

DOCTOR CLAUDE.

POPULAR FRENCH NOVELS.

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OR,

LOVE RENDERED DESPERATE.

BY HECTOR MALOT

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BOOK IV.

I.

CLAUDE and Veronica lived as on a mountain summit in the full sunlight, above the hum of the crowd and the turmoil of the world, and neither saw nor heard anything of what was going on below them. The wings of happiness had carried them to a land of bliss, and they were like those who at summer tide fix their abodes on some Alpine plateau, dwelling there in a pure atmosphere under a radiant sky, seeing nothing, hearing nothing of the human bustle in the plains at their feet, which the clouds hide from view.

Directly they had made their marriage visits, which were as few and as short as possible, they shut themselves up indoors. If Claude had not been retained in Condé by the exigencies of his profession, he would have taken his wife away to some secluded spot, where they might have lived together, seeing no one, unknown by all. But being obliged to remain in the town, he determined that their intimacy and privacy should at least be as complete as possible. To his patients he gave his mornings and afternoons; his evenings being exclusively reserved to Veronica. They were long evenings, moreover, for they dined early, save when some very grave case retained Claude away from home.

The meal did not occupy much time, for although the dinner-table may be especially attractive in the winter, when the lamp sheds a mellow light around, and a bright fire burns in the hearth, whilst out of doors the wind and the rain beat against the shutters, it ceases to have the same charm, unless

one be a gourmand, when the sun shines in the cloudless sky, and nature is decked with all its charms. At this moment the summer was at its height, and while they hastily dined, Esperance was occupied in harnessing the horse to the phaeton, so that directly dessert was over they seated themselves in the vehicle, and off they went.

Thus, until eleven o'clock or midnight, they were alone by themselves. In the town the horse went at a rapid pace, for Claude was always afraid of being stopped by some patient with only "just one word" to say ; but directly they were in the country he checked this speed, and, holding the reins listlessly with one hand, he clasped his other arm round his wife, who, as he leaned towards her, raised her head and looked lovingly at him. This was perhaps not the correct way to drive on a high-road, but the horse was a quiet one, and the people they chanced to meet willingly got out of the way. They were known to every one.

"There goes Dr. Claude with his young wife," the country people would remark ; "they seem to be awfully fond of each other."

When a town is situated like Condé, in the midst of an undulating, woody country, the environs are bound to be attractive, and it was generally towards some forest that Claude and Veronica shaped their course, either to the woods of La Rouvrage, when they had but little time at their disposal, or to those of Rudemont or Le Camp-Hérault, when they were more at liberty.

They would leave the phaeton at some inn, or else at a keeper's lodge ; and when neither lodge nor inn was near, the reins were simply tied to a tree, and then hand in hand the pair set forth on a lengthened stroll. Although the sun was low in the horizon, it had not yet set. Silence reigned in the forest. The woodman's axe and the rumble of wheels were no longer heard. Occasionally the stillness was broken by the note of some bird, or by the jingling of the tiny bells worn by the cows on their way from the meadows to the farm.

Every now and then they sat down, as Claude would not allow Veronica to tire herself, and they usually chose an open spot, some heath whence the eye could survey the wooded hill-sides, and catch a glimpse of the distant plain, where everything was growing indistinct. Seated side by side, holding each other's hands, they would remain watching the night steal over the woods. How calm, how pleasant every-

thing was—the fields lost in shadow, the smoke curling above the copse-hidden cottages, the windows gleaming in the last sun-ray, the distant rumble of the belated waggons, the lowing of the oxen in the meadows, the barking of the farm dogs, the sound of the church bell ringing the angelus. Then the night came on apace, and above their heads myriads of tiny stars peered out of the deep azure sky. Then a sigh, a word, an exclamation would at times escape them simultaneously; but their hearts were too full for them to speak, and it was in a mutual embrace that they told each other of their love. It was now time to think of returning home, and the inn or lodge being reached, they mounted the vehicle. Veronica nestled close beside her husband, and then the horse started off at a rapid trot for Condé.

Why could they not always be together thus? But of a morning it was necessary that Claude should go to the hospital, and later on he had to visit his patients. Then after a hasty luncheon he had to attend to those patients who called to see him during his consulting hour. At times Veronica found his patients kept him away from her too long, and then she would knock discreetly at the study door, and wait till he came and opened it.

“What is it?” he would ask.

“I have come for a consultation. I don’t feel very well, and I think that a kiss would do me good.”

“Certainly, that is precisely what you want.” And the kiss being given and returned, given again and returned again, she left him all happiness and smiles.

II.

THERE are moments in the flood-tide of happiness when loving hearts are seized with a vague misgiving; the fear of those who say to themselves, “I am too happy, it cannot always last thus.” When one is struggling or suffering it is only natural to hope for a change; and, on the other hand, when one is completely happy and has nought to desire, a strange anxiety and dread frequently steal over one. There is really nothing to inspire fear, and yet one is afraid; one reflects that in this world there is nothing eternal, save our souls.

Thoughts such as these stole across Veronica’s mind one

October evening as she sat alone in her room before the fire, waiting for Claude, who had gone out to see a patient. The fine weather had passed away, and they had been compelled to abandon their evening excursions through the woods. The roads were now in a pitiable state owing to the autumn rains; the wind had a bitter chill whenever it blew from the sea; the nights were dark; and now was the time to spend one's evening by the fireside. Veronica would not have complained of this change if her husband had been left entirely to her; for the hours they spent together before the glowing embers were full of charm; but, unfortunately, these moments of intimacy were frequently interrupted by a ring at the bell—some patient had sent for the doctor. Claude had a high sense of duty, and however little disposed he might be to go out, however grieved he might be to have to leave his dear little wife, to interrupt their conversation or the perusal of some book he was reading to her, he, nevertheless, put on his overcoat and started off. It has long since been admitted that a doctor belongs to everybody except himself; that he has no right to repose, sleep, or privacy. The bell rings, and off he must go. A pretty affair if he did not obey the patients' summons. So far as Claude was himself concerned, the town was scandalized enough already at learning that he charged double for the visits he made at night time.

While Veronica was waiting for him and unable to read, or even to work, she looked into the fire and thought. It was in this same room, her room when she was a girl, that she had first thought of Claude—thought of him so persistently that his name and image became engraved on her heart. Who would then have been able to predict her present happiness? Claude was so reserved with her; her fortune bothered him; and then he did not yet love her. It was she who had first thought of him and loved him.

Each footstep in the street disturbed her reverie and made her raise her head. But long before the passer by had reached the house she knew that it was not Claude. She was able to distinguish his foot following all others; she would never have mistaken another's step for his resolute stride. Before resuming her meditation, she rose and arranged the fire. When he came back he would be wet and cold, and so she placed an arm-chair, all ready for him in front of the chimney-piece. She would be able to draw hers close beside, and then clasping each others hands, they might converse together.

How happy she was! How sweet and charming was their life! And to think that this happiness might not have been theirs, owing to Claude's exaggerated delicacy. When they used to meet it seemed as if he avoided looking at her or speaking to her. He did, perhaps, glance at her in a timid furtive manner, but then he did not speak at all. How long the time had been before he pronounced the decisive word. Still it had at last been spoken, and now how happy they were. But would this happiness last, she thought. Was there nothing to threaten it? Had Claude been by her side such a thought would never have occurred to her. While he was there to defend her, she had no fear of evil. But alone she did not feel so firm and valiant. Why? She did not know; she was frightened, not merely of the future, but also of the past.

A rapid footstep resounded in the street. It was he. Quickly she glided downstairs to open the hall door to hang up his hat, and take off his overcoat, herself. They went upstairs together, and when the door was closed, she threw herself into his arms. "Oh love," she said, "your wife does not know how to wait for you." Then taking him by the hand, she led him towards the arm chair that she had placed before the fire, and sat down beside him. They looked at each other with delight, like two lovers who meet again after a long separation.

"You haven't been amusing yourself, I can see," said Claude, "and I can understand that the time may have seemed long to you; but it seems to me there is a dash of melancholy in those beautiful eyes. Nay, I'm sure of it, although you laugh—you didn't laugh while I wasn't there. Come, tell me what you were doing, what you were thinking about?"

"I was thinking of my husband."

"Well, I might have guessed that, but what were you thinking about him?"

"I was thinking that he was handsome, and good, and affectionate and generous—superior to everybody else; and that I knew all that a long while before he—who is somewhat diffident—ever dreamt that there was a young person in the world named Verónica whom he might one day fall in love with."

"Naïve, he is. I will grant it, but still he is not blind, and the first time that he saw Mademoiselle Veronica Lerissel in her morning dress walking up the steps of this very house, he was dazzled, positively dazzled."

"Ah! dear Etienne, how good you are to speak like that;

but then why didn't you say to yourself, 'I will marry that dazzling young person'?"

"Because it is not in my nature to form presumptuous designs; and in my position it would have been a presumptuous idea for me to think of becoming your husband."

"But later on?"

"I did not wish to marry."

"Why? Who—what prevented you?"

"Because I was afraid I might not meet with the kind of woman I wanted for my wife."

"Then your fear was conquered by your love?"

"Precisely. Ah, what a good thing it is to listen to one's impulses, and how I bless my weakness which has made me the happiest of men."

"Really?"

"Do you doubt me?"

"No—but I like to hear you say it. If you only knew how pleasant it is for me to listen to you when you speak like that. No more bad thoughts—"

"What, you have had bad thoughts?"

"Perhaps—"

"You see I was not mistaken when I said those eyes were tinged with melancholy. What have you been fretting about?"

"You won't be angry?"

"You cannot make me angry, but you will make me feel sad if you don't speak."

Veronica seized her husbands' hands, and drawing him nearer to her, looked into his eyes.

"I asked myself," she said slowly, and in a voice that trembled with emotion, "if in former times you did not perhaps love some one whom you perhaps meant to have married, whom at all events you loved, and whose memory you were faithful to for a long while so that you never noticed anybody else. Will you answer me?"

"Certainly."

Claude felt disturbed and nervous at this question of Veronica's. How was it that she, so confiding, who knew herself to be tenderly loved—how was it that she had had this thought? How had it arisen in her mind? What had suggested it? Had she seen any one? Had she been frightened by some imprudent or perfidious remark? He felt alarmed. Had Nathalie spoken to her? He looked at his wife, and at once his mind was at ease again. It was so easy to read the truth in her open face.

her frank eyes. Evidently this was a spontaneous case of jealous curiosity.

"The somebody else you refer to," he said, "never existed. When a man loves his wife, the past is entirely obliterated. You mustn't reason by what you feel or may have felt yourself. General experience tells us that a fresh love irrevocably obliterates any affection that ever preceded it; it effaces even the recollection of a former attachment. If this is the case in reference to any woman, it is especially so as regards a man's wife—the wife he loves, who is his own. He gives that wife his name, his honour to defend; he works for her; he esteems her; he invests her with every virtue; he respects her, and causes her to be respected; he desires that she may bear him children; he longs for a bond of affection that shall unite him still more closely to her." So saying, Claude passed his arm round his wife's waist.

"I am listening to you," she said in a soft voice, "go on."

"He leads that wife through life; he looks upon her as indispensable; he is her guardian. And the feelings that animate him towards her, towards the dear, pure, honest woman who is his wife, are not the same feelings that might have animated him in earlier times as regards another woman. These feelings are entirely of a different order; they are forgotten in the holier love one feels for one's wife. So, dear one, you need not think over the past; rest assured that he who is your husband, never loved any woman with the love he bears you—that love which is symbolical of truth and honour. There have been men who have killed their wives because they deceived them—"

Veronica threw herself into his arms, and sealed his lips with a kiss. "Then," said she with a smile, "I am certain to die only of old age."

III.

ALTHOUGH Veronica had no greater joy than to be alone with her husband at dinner and during the evening as often indeed as the opportunity presented itself, it occurred to her that she ought to ask Nathalie to come and dine with them once a week, and accordingly she communicated this idea to Claude. Nathalie must feel very lonely in her little apartment all by

herself; would it not be friendly to ask her to dinner every Thursday? By doing so they would not merely perform an act of politeness, but pay off a debt of friendship and relationship.

Claude, like his wife, would have preferred to live perpetually alone; and in this respect he was swayed, not merely by the same reasons as Veronica, but by others which were personal to himself. Nathalie's presence invariably annoyed him, and if it were necessary that a third person should participate in their intimacy, he would rather it were any one else than her. Still, he could not refuse Veronica's request, and accordingly authorised her to invite her cousin, remarking to himself that he might lessen the anxiety her presence was likely to cause him, by asking some other people to dinner on the same day. With three or four guests at the table he would feel far more at his ease than if Nathalie were the only one; for the conversation would turn on general subjects, instead of being confined to private affairs.

He did not, however, have occasion to carry his precautions into effect. Nathalie declined the standing invitation which her cousin offered her. "I must not offend your husband," she remarked, "he did not wish me to remain in this house, or to live with you on a footing of intimacy; and I do not desire to disturb your privacy—at least for the present—later on we may see."

It was not, however, a question of disturbing or not disturbing their privacy; Nathalie's object was to spare herself the sufferings which the spectacle of their happiness invariably caused her. It was, above all, necessary that she should not betray herself, and that she should still continue to show them the smiling mask that she had assumed. Seated near them at table or by the fireside, too tender a glance or too passionate a word might have made her lose her presence of mind. It was better that she should not expose herself to this danger; it was better that she should not see Claude at all, rather than behold him making love to his wife.

But although Nathalie did not come to dinner, she continued to watch over Veronica, and she rarely allowed a day to pass without "just looking in;" her visits generally taking place while Claude was away. By this means she not merely spared herself the pain and worry which any exhibition of affection might have caused her, but she was, moreover, able to question Veronica on whatever subject she pleased without interference. On her arrival one day she found Veronica engaged in preparing

her layette, at which Nathalie's alarm and wonder were so great that she remained for a moment without being able to articulate a word. When, however, she learned from her cousin that, spite of these preparations, no baby was as yet expected, her mind was set at rest, and she perceived that the work Veronica was engaged on would afford her an admirable pretext to prosecute day by day an inquiry on this all-important subject. "Well, and the little stranger?" she would ask as she walked into the room of an afternoon. And when Veronica shook her head negatively she would continue, "You know I must be god-mamma."

In the evening Veronica usually related to her husband all that had occurred during the day, and generally repeated to him what Nathalie had said. Claude soon thought to himself that she must now be quite cured, and that he had acted wrongly in fancying her capable of executing the threats she had launched forth in an access of irresponsible anger. And if at times on the morrow he chanced on coming home to find her engaged in conversation with Veronica, he felt seized with pity, and willingly softened the reserve and coldness which of recent times he had invariably shown towards her. On some occasions when he looked at her, he felt quite affected. If she were sincere, how she must have suffered! Formerly her toilettes were elegant, and even coquettish, now, however, she did not seem to pay any attention to her personal appearance. She was no longer the superb bold woman he had known, proud of her beauty, looking down on the weaknesses of common nature. Leaning back in an arm-chair, her hands drooping by her sides, her attitude expressive of weariness and fatigue, all that appeared of her former ardour was an occasional gleam of her sunken black eyes. The scintillation only lasted for a second, and then she resumed her habitual air of humility. When she rose to leave, she did so in a nonchalant manner, walking away with apparent lassitude, and without any of that buoyancy and suppleness once so remarkable in her.

Besides questioning Veronica, Nathalie also thought fit to advise her, suggesting that it was as well not to say anything to her husband concerning the little stranger until she was absolutely certain on the point; for if she made a mistake, she might cause him a great disappointment. Nathalie felt greatly relieved at finding that Veronica still continued to answer her questions in a negative sense. It was this circumstance which led her to delay her murderous design.

She had frequently endeavoured to stir up a quarrel—even a little one—between Claude and Veronica, but always in vain. It was useless for her to try and deceive herself—they loved each other; nothing could prevent them from doing so; nothing could separate them—nothing but death.

When after these visits Nathalie returned home to her cold and solitary apartment, it seemed as if despair would overwhelm her. Was there ever such another unfortunate woman, she asked herself. Everything seemed to conspire against her; so long as her cousin lived, Claude would never return to her, and so she still fostered the humble idea of taking the life of Veronica with her own hand. If her days were terrible, her nights were still more so. She had no relaxation. For ever and ever from morning till night, and from night till morning, the same thought assailed her.

When she took up her abode in the Rue de l'Hôpital she did not engage a regular servant, but simply a woman of the place, who came during a few hours every day. When she left, Nathalie remained all alone, for her faithful friend of other times, her much loved cat, Lady Jane, had declined to go and live in the new dwelling; and although carried there several times, had always managed to find her way back to the Boulevard du Château, to the house where she had been brought up and to which she was accustomed.

Thus it was then that Nathalie, quite companionless, dwelt on the same thought incessantly. No doubt the law is right in punishing the premeditation of a crime; but, on the other hand, this premeditation, if long fostered and adjourned, must necessarily torture its author; and if his or her nature be an intelligent one, able to reason as well as to feel, the expiation of the offence begins even before it is committed. So it was with Nathalie, but instead of the tortures she felt leading her to abandon her design, they impelled her to hasten its execution. She could remain in this state of suspense no longer.

It was about this time that Thivolet the banker, after remaining more dead than alive for many months past, took it into his head to die in reality; and when his will was opened, it was found that it did not contain even the smallest legacy for Madame Gillet who, according to the scandalmongers, was to have inherited the bulk of his property. All Condé was astonished, and during several days the whole talk of the town had reference to Thivolet and Madame Gillet.

"For my part," remarked Lajardie, "I am not sorry that

matters should have taken this course. In the first place, it is a victory of providential justice, the 'Triumph of Virtue,' like the last act of a melo-drama. And then I am rather flattered to find that a man may at times be more cunning than a woman. That old rascal has outwitted Madame Gillet, and yet she's no fool. Now it will be an interesting sight to see her fishing for a husband, minus the fortune she was hoping to secure; who will she try and catch?"

If this event caused no little surprise in the town and afforded the subject of much conversation, it produced a strange impression on Claude and caused him to reflect. The accusations launched against Nathalie were then, he felt, false. As Thivolet had not left her anything it was scarcely likely that he had ever been her lover—like so many people had pretended. Of course, there was the talk which Lajardie had had with the banker—while the latter was drunk; but that had perhaps been more or less exaggerated when repeated by Lajardie to Claude. Besides, no names had been mentioned in the course of that conversation. Lajardie had merely inferred that Thivolet was alluding to Madame Gillet. If then the banker had not been the young widow's lover, and now that Claude reasoned calmly it seemed very likely that he never had been, she had spoken truly when she swore that she was innocent. In not believing her, in not listening to her protestations and her oaths, he, Claude, had behaved unjustly towards her.

With love for Veronica predominant at this moment in his heart, it was not for him to regret having broken off his engagement with Nathalie; although his feelings towards the latter became modified. When by himself, he pitied her; and then as frankness was the distinguishing trait of his character, he could not help assuming a sympathetic manner in her presence. At least he owed her sympathy, if not more, for he had made her suffer cruelly, not merely by abandoning her when she still loved him; but also by making Veronica his wife. He thought that he might the more easily allow himself to be guided by a feeling of sympathy as he was certain that he no longer loved her, besides being under the impression that she herself no longer cared for him. If she still loved him, it would have been impossible, he reasoned, for her to support with a smiling face the proofs and tokens of affection that he continually gave to Veronica. After all, why should not friendship follow love?

But what he meant for simple sympathy and pity, implied something very different in Nathalie's heated imagination. When

she perceived this change in the sentiments of her former lover, it seemed as if she might dare to hope. "He is coming back to me," she said to herself, "he is already getting tired of his wife. He compares us together; he is doing me justice in his own mind. If he were only free, he would come back to me altogether."

For him to be free, there was only one step to take :—The time had now arrived for Veronica to fall ill.

IV.

THERE was only one thing that Nathalie had not foreseen and arranged—how she should administer the poison. The time had come to clear up this point and to watch for a favourable opportunity. If she had been living with Claude and Veronica, occasions, such as she wanted, would have frequently presented themselves. Nothing would then have been easier than to find a means of pouring a few drops of strophantus into some beverage intended for her cousin. But, unfortunately, at the hours she called, Veronica neither ate nor drank. It would have indeed been difficult to invent a pretext to get her to drink anything; and even if Nathalie did succeed in that respect would she be able to pour the poison into whatever beverage her cousin might take? Suppose her efforts in that direction were even crowned with success, her intervention having been so direct and manifest might become a source of future danger.

It might also be dangerous if Claude were present at the attack which the poison would provoke. It would be better if this attack were described to him, for doctors don't look at things with ordinary people's eyes, and sufficiently characteristic symptoms to excite his suspicions might display themselves in his presence. Accordingly, after having examined the situation from every point of view, Nathalie resolved to wait until chance furnished her with the favourable opportunity that she needed. This delay sufficed to exasperate her, after the many postponements she had been forced to make, but then she had not planned this design of hers so laboriously as to compromise its success at the eleventh hour by her own imprudence.

She never missed going to one of her windows at the hours when Claude usually arrived at and quitted the hospital. One morning somewhat before his ordinary time for leaving, she per-

ceived his phaeton standing before the gateway. Its presence plainly signified that instead of visiting his town patients on foot as was his ordinary custom on leaving the hospital, he was going at once into the country for some urgent case; and consequently the probabilities were that he would not return home to lunch with Veronica. Nathalie made up her mind at once. If Claude was not present at the meal, she at all events would be there.

Claude walked out of the hospital, and seeing her at her window waved his hand towards her in a friendly, almost affectionate manner. She could not be mistaken! Evidently she was still dear to him.

The hour for action had arrived. She opened a cupboard and took out a glass phial containing a liquid of a somewhat opaline colour. She poured a very small quantity of it into a crystal smelling-salts bottle; but her hand trembled in doing so, and two or three drops were spilt on the table.

Was she frightened at this trifling mishap? She rose and gazed at herself in the looking glass. Her face was ghastly pale. What a miserable woman she thought she was, having neither strength nor will! But this moment of weakness did not last; she had fostered her design too long, she had sought to impress herself with its justice too persistently to allow a mere instinctive movement to turn her from it. On reflection, she even said to herself that this movement of weakness was in her favour. She felt she was not naturally cruel. This thought strengthened her. It was, indeed, not her fault, she was only acting in obedience to fate.

At an hour when Nathalie knew Veronica would be at table, she entered the house on the Boulevard du Château; although her heart was beating quickly, she was perfectly resolute. She found Veronica lunching alone. "Will you have some lunch with me?" asked the latter, after exchanging an affectionate greeting with Madame Gillet.

"No thanks," replied Nathalie, "I have just had mine."

"What a pity. Etienne has gone into the country and won't be back until this evening, so that I am obliged to lunch by myself, and as I haven't any appetite your presence might have made me eat."

"Are you ill? Is anything the matter?"

Veronica cast down her eyes; then suddenly raising them and looking at Nathalie with an expression of quiet joy, she replied. "I am not very well, but it does not worry me—on

the contrary." Nathalie trembled. She would have spoken, but so great was her emotion that it was impossible for her to articulate a word. "You know," continued Veronica, "it is not at all certain, but I think that before very long you will have the pleasure of becoming a god-mamma."

Had Nathalie yet hesitated in her design these words would have sufficed to banish her irresolution. "A child!"—thought she, "a living link between Claude and Veronica. That must never be." With a movement of ferocious, furious hatred she pressed the tiny smelling-salts bottle which she held in her hand. "I came to ask you for one of those collars that Mademoiselle Ledoux made for you. I want it as a pattern," she said.

"I'll give you one after lunch," replied Veronica.

"The fact is I'm rather in a hurry."

Veronica rose at once from her chair and went upstairs. Nathalie was alone in the dining-room; for on her arrival the maid who usually waited at table had left the room, and would only return when rung for. The doors were closed. Who then could see her?

Veronica had left some jugged hare unfinished on her plate and her glass was half full of wine and water. Nathalie remained for an instant undecided. Should she pour the drops of strophantus into the glass or into the plate? On reflection it seemed probable that the poison would be less perceptible in the sauce of the hare than in the wine and water, and accordingly she emptied the contents of the small bottle into the plate, and then quickly stirred it up with Veronica's fork. Her hand was trembling now; her heart had stopped beating, but so far as the perpetration of the act was concerned she had not had a moment's weakness.

Veronica re-entered the room with the collar, Nathalie had asked her for, wrapped up in paper.

On perceiving her, Nathalie rose and took the packet from her hands. "Good-bye!" she said, "don't let your luncheon get cold."

"Come back to-morrow," replied Veronica.

"Yes, to-morrow or this evening; don't trouble yourself." And with these words Nathalie left the house, while her cousin sat down again before the table and finished her lunch without finding anything strange in the taste of the hare.

When the meal was over, Veronica went upstairs to her room, and commenced to work at her layette. She must not dawdle

over it now, for before long she would have the joy of giving Claude an pledge of their affection. She gaily stitched away; and never had she displayed such activity, never had she felt such pleasure in accomplishing her task. Her surprise was all the greater when after a certain lapse of time she began to feel her head quite heavy; then suddenly she felt sick and experienced a great difficulty in breathing.

She was obliged to interrupt her work and lie down on the sofa; she was stifling and it seemed as if she would faint. On lying down she fell into a state of semi-somnolence, but without sleeping, for she suffered too much at not being able to breathe. Her breast no longer heaved, and her heart seemed to have stopped beating. She had never felt anything like this before, and this stifling sensation was so painful that she became frightened. "Was she going to die?" she asked herself. "To die without having Etienne near her. If he were only there he would save her."

Her slow laborious breathing imitated the sound of a locomotive, and each moment it seemed as if it would stop. The bell being within her reach, she rung it. Her maid at once entered the room, and on perceiving her mistress, gave vent to a cry of alarm.

"*Mon Dieu!* what is the matter with madame?"

Veronica motioned her with her hand to bring a basin near her, and immediately afterwards she was terribly sick; her whole frame being seized with convulsions, as is the case with those who suffer from a violent attack of sea sickness, or to whom an emetic has been administered. When she had ceased to vomit, she continued shivering and trembling. At each moment she opened and closed her mouth, moving her jaws from side to side as if to get rid of some nasty taste in her mouth. She had retained the full exercise of her intelligence, but she seemed benumbed from head to foot. She would have liked to sleep, and it was a positive suffering to have to answer the questions which the servant, who had lost her head, was continually addressing to her.

"Had I not better go for a doctor?" the maid at last enquired.

But Veronica replied that she would have no other medical attendant than her husband.

By-and-bye she was again sick, the previous convulsions seizing her with renewed violence, and for a moment she really thought that she was about to die. But little by little she got

better, and her breathing became less difficult. When she opened her eyes, the housemaid and the cook, who were now together in the room, insisted on sending for a doctor.

"No, no," answered Veronica, "I feel better. I think I shall soon be all right again." She was not mistaken. Within a brief interval her breathing became, if not perfectly regular and uniform, at all events much easier ; she no longer felt sick, and the stifling feeling subsided. She told the servants to leave her alone for a little while so that she might rest, but as she was about going to sleep, Nathalie entered the room. "I have just heard that you have been ill," remarked Madame Gillet.

"So ill that I thought I should die," replied Veronica gaily.

"And you tell me that with a laugh?"

"Yes, because I am the happiest of women." Nathalie was absolutely stupefied. "Don't you understand," resumed Veronica, "that this attack confirms what I told you this morning. Ah, how happy Etienne will be." And then perceiving Nathalie's bewilderment, she added :—"Why don't you speak. You stand there like a statue of astonishment. Come and kiss me, god-mamma."

V.

WHEN Claude returned home he found Nathalie with his wife, who was in bed. Directly he entered the house, the maid told him that madame had been taken ill, very ill, and he immediately rushed upstairs in a state of bewildered terror. "What's the matter, darling?" he exclaimed, as he entered Veronica's room.

With a single stride he reached the bed. His wife stretched out her arms, and they embraced each other affectionately. Then Claude repeated his question. "What is the matter? What has happened?"

Nathalie stepped out of the shade in which she had lingered, and would have explained in a few words what had taken place.

"Were you there?" asked Claude impatiently.

"No, I arrived when Veronica was already better."

"Then," said he, "it is preferable that Veronica should tell me herself what she felt. Are you tired, dear?"

"Not only I don't feel tired, but I don't even feel ill. I am very happy. The servant acted very wrongly in frightening you, simply because I was taken sick." Veronica spoke with a smile on her face, while her eyes gazed tenderly at Claude. "There is more cause for happiness than worry," she continued. "What does it matter if I suffered a little?"

"I shall only know whether there is cause for happiness or worry when you have told me exactly what took place."

"Oh, the naughty doctor."

"Precisely. Just now I am speaking to you as a doctor, not as your husband."

"Well, before I answer the doctor, my husband must kiss me."

When he had done so, Veronica asked him to take a chair, and sit down by the bedside so that she might look at him and hold his hands. Then she began her narrative, relating how she had been seized with a feeling of sickness and stifling, shortly after eating her luncheon.

"And what had you eaten?"

"A boiled egg, a little jugged hare and an apple."

"And you drank?"

"Two glasses of wine and water."

"What wine?"

"The wine remaining in the bottle that was opened at dinner yesterday; the hare too was what was left from last night." Then she continued her narrative expatiating on the difficulty she had experienced in breathing, her attacks of sickness, her numbness and trembling.

Whilst she spoke, Nathalie watched Claude's face, anxious to see what effect his wife's words produced. She noted in turn an expression of deep affection, then one of anxiety, and finally one of intense astonishment. One phrase especially seemed to affect him more than all the others. It constantly recurred in Veronica's narrative—"My heart," said she, "had stopped beating."

When Veronica had finished, Nathalie thought fit to speak. "It was at that moment," she said, "that chance brought me here. As Veronica was still up I made her go to bed and prepared her some tisane."

"You took care of me like a mother," observed Veronica.

"I scolded you also."

"Would you believe it," resumed Veronica, "she reproached me because I had not sent for another doctor."

"Certainly, I did," replied Nathalie: "although I can un-

derstand that you do not wish to have any other doctor than your husband."

"In my opinion there are no other doctors but him."

"But when he is not there, when he cannot come to your assistance, you should remember that there are other medical men in the world. I persist, therefore, in saying, and I say it unhesitatingly, that you ought not to have prevented the servants from fetching the first doctor they might find at home." These words were uttered in a firm voice, and as she spoke them Nathalie looked at Claude, for she intended them more for him than for Veronica.

Claude, however, did not reply. There was something for him to do of greater urgency and import than engaging in a discussion on this subject. He must examine his wife and endeavour to ascertain what was the cause of this strange attack. He rose from his chair and asked Veronica to sit up in bed. Then leaning over her, he placed his head against her side and listened to the beating of her heart.

"Well?" inquired Nathalie when he had finished.

"There is nothing characteristic," he replied. "The beatings are rapid and scarcely uniform; but that is sufficiently natural after such an attack."

"If you only knew how I suffered," said Veronica. "I thought that my heart was going to stop beating altogether."

"When you have had a headache, or felt poorly, before now, have you ever experienced anything similar?"

"No, I don't think so."

Claude remained for a moment with his eyes fixed on the ground, reflecting, seeking to explain to himself the problem that presented itself. "Do you know you frighten me," remarked Veronica. "I thought that being ill like that—meant that what I told you I fancied this morning was true."

"No," replied Claude, "you are mistaken. Those symptoms mean nothing of the kind."

"Ah! *mon Dieu*, and I felt almost happy in the midst of those terrible sufferings."

Nathalie listened to this dialogue with marked attention and curiosity—examining Claude's face with renewed watchfulness, so as to try and decipher his thoughts. She at length determined to carry matters a step further. "Then, if the attack does not signify that Veronica is *enceinte* as she hoped, what could have caused it?" she asked in a voice which she strove should be as firm as possible.

"I am trying to find out."

"May she not have eaten something that didn't agree with her?"

"Perhaps."

Nathalie hesitated for an instant, then feeling sure of her voice she resumed—"That might have poisoned her?"

"A boiled egg, an apple—some hare which I partook of myself yesterday?" rejoined Claude in an interrogative manner.

"Perhaps the saucepan in which the hare was warmed up, had not been properly cleaned," observed Nathalie.

"Did it have a metallic flavour?" said Claude, looking at Veronica.

"No, it tasted like hare always does."

"Then," remarked Claude, "it is scarcely likely your sickness was caused by the absorption of copper salts. I know that a very small quantity of them will suffice to make a person vomit, but then their taste is so pronounced that it is impossible to swallow them without noticing it. However, I will at all events inspect this saucepan."

Nathalie had formed the bold and almost rash design of submitting the basin into which Veronica had vomited, to Claude's examination, and she had accordingly forbidden the servants either to empty or clean it. She had not forgotten that phrase in the naval doctor's letter, confirmed by the statements of the green covered pamphlet: "In the present state of science no traces of strophantus can be detected in the person to whom it is administered; no matter however minute and careful the search may be." If that was true, and it ought to be true, Claude would fail to discover anything; and by the mere fact of having asked him to examine the vomit, she would place herself beyond suspicion, should it ever be argued that Veronica had been poisoned. If her cousin had been unable to support this attack and had expired in a convulsion, she would not have provoked such an examination; indeed, she would probably have ordered the basin to be cleaned; for in the presence of death a scientific analysis would have taken place, and however great might be the probabilities in favour of the poison remaining undiscovered, it would at the same time have been somewhat dangerous to risk a minute investigation. But then instead of expiring Veronica had got well again; and consequently it appeared probable that Claude's examination would not be such a searching one.

Accordingly she informed him that she had ordered the contents of the basin to be left intact, and then put on her mantle and bonnet—"You won't need me any more," she said, "so I am going. To-morrow morning on your way to the hospital would you mind calling and letting me know how Veronica has passed the night?"

"I will certainly call," replied Claude, who could not help feeling touched by Nathalie's seeming solicitude.

As she reached the door of the room, she turned round again—"If you should want me," she said, "pray send for me. I should be angry with you Veronica if you allowed me to sleep while you were in pain."

Directly after her departure, Claude went down stairs into the kitchen, and asked to see the saucepan in which the jugged hare had been warmed up. It was irreproachably clean. He then drank a glass of water out of the decanter which Veronica had used at lunch, but he found it perfectly limpid and without any particular taste. Then when Veronica, who now seemed all right again, had gone to sleep, he carefully examined the vomited matter, but without learning anything from the inspection.

The whole affair seemed to him quite inexplicable. Since their marriage Veronica had twice been indisposed with pains that radiated towards the hips, the sides, and the arms; symptoms of dysphony and a feeling of sickness had, moreover, shown themselves. These indispositions had worried Claude considerably, for he had failed to satisfy himself as to their cause. He could not make up his mind whether to see in them some form of colic, a species of diphtheria, or simply a case of hysteria; and when he compared this fresh and far more violent attack to the preceding ones, he was obliged to say to himself that the whole matter was inexplicable. He owned it to Nathalie in the frankest manner when he saw her in the Rue de l'Hôpital on the morrow. She breathed again. If he had found nothing, she thought she might rest assured that the other doctors would fail to detect any traces of the poison.

"But did you not learn anything from the vomited matter?" she asked.

"Nothing at all."

"Then what is your opinion?"

"I really don't know. The heart was most probably attacked. But how? By what? I am reduced to ask myself the question."

"And now how is she?"

"She seems very well again."

Claude was about to withdraw, but Nathalie retained him. "You have just uttered a word," she said, "which I think you will do well to think over. I refer to the mention you made of Veronica's heart."

"Well, what?"

"Of course, I can have no thought of doubting your scientific authority. You yourself will admit that, I am sure. You know how I esteem you; what faith I have in *you*——" Claude started. "In you as a doctor," continued Nathalie quickly; "for we are talking of medical matters, and of them alone. Now, don't you think you may have been in error when you examined her the first time? Don't you think that she already carried in her the seed of the complaint which has just been manifested?"

"There is no complaint; only an accident, as you call it."

"Well, accident if you like; but don't you think now that this accident has occurred--don't you think that there may have been reasons for Dr. Nautier to fear a complaint of the heart, and for me to admit that such was the case? Think over it, and you will see, I hope, that you were very prompt in your accusations on that subject--you have already recognised that you were too prompt in other accusations--the injustice of which time has shown beyond the shadow of a doubt--though, alas! too late for me. However, I don't desire to insist on that point. If I refer to this complaint of the heart, it is more in Veronica's interest than in my own. It is to call your attention to the matter, which I should certainly not have done if you had not told me that you were quite at sea concerning what happened yesterday."

VI.

NATHALIE would have preferred Claude to have gone entirely astray--seeking to ascribe Veronica's symptoms to some particular complaint, rather than admitting that what had happened was in his eyes utterly inexplicable. If he had thought her afflicted with any given malady, he would have endeavoured, above all, to reconcile her symptoms with the usual features of that ailment, without looking elsewhere to identify them; and thus he might have persisted in his mistake for a long while, if

not for ever. Still, at all events, she had achieved a considerable result. If a doctor like Claude had found no traces of the poison, evidently the letter written by her husband's cousin told the truth.

It was impossible that a conscientious, high-minded man such as she knew Claude to be should not be struck by what she had said concerning Veronica's heart complaint ; and in his present uncertainty he would be bound to ask himself if he had not formerly been mistaken. Thus she would have attained a double result. She would have justified herself, and she would have misled him.

The success of this first step exceeded her hopes, and necessarily encouraged her to persevere in her design. However, the second dose of poison must be smaller, so that its effects might be less violent, with the view of not provoking Claude's suspicions. But if it had been difficult for her to administer the first dose, it was bound to be far more so for her to administer the second. She must evidently not proceed in the same manner, even should chance create a similar situation. There must be something novel, original, and bold about the administration of this second dose ; indeed, she was convinced that crimes of this nature are usually discovered, owing to the culprit's excessive prudence and timidity. Accordingly, she pondered over the matter ; and as it was the only question she had on her mind, it was not long before the idea she was in search of came to her.

Although Claude considered all those who invited him either to ball or dinner as enemies who attacked his happiness as well as his repose, and although he endeavoured, by all possible means, to avoid accepting their invitations, he could not possibly decline every one of them. Some of them claimed his acceptance either by right of friendship or for professional motives. Thus it was in reference to Lady Sarah Barrington's evening parties, at one of which Nathalie decided to administer the second dose of strophanthus. The very boldness of such an act, perpetrated in public, with scores of guests around her, would suffice to disarm suspicion.

According to custom, Nathalie set out for this party in company with Claude and Veronica, who called for her with the carriage on their way. Lady Barrington's mansion being a large one, built, moreover, with the view of giving entertainments, there was no fear of the guests being huddled together, as is commonly the case, not merely in the provinces, but in

the capital. There was always plenty of room to walk about, and those who chose to isolate themselves were usually able to enjoy comparative privacy, either in some corner of the conservatory, or in one of the outlying rooms.

Nathalie was well acquainted with the house and its arrangements. By enticing Veronica into some out-of-the-way corner she would be able to profit of the moment when refreshments were served, either to pour a few drops of liquid strophantus into a glass or cup, or to imbed a fragment of the dried extract into a cake or biscuit. All that she would then have to do would be to get Veronica either to drink the beverage or to eat the cake, whichever circumstances might render the easier of the two. With this object in view, she carried in her pocket her smelling-salts bottle containing a few drops of strophantus, as well as a little lozenge box in which was placed a small piece of the dried extract.

More than once during the evening she forgot to listen to what was being said to her, and more than once also she forgot to answer those who spoke; for she was thoroughly absorbed with her design. At length she perceived several of the servants arrive, carrying trays on which were placed cups of tea, coffee, and chocolate. In a minute she was at Veronica's side, and under the pretext that she had something important to tell her, she persuaded her to go into the conservatory. Here they seated themselves, surrounded by tree-like ferns and other full foliaged plants—on the very seat where Denise and Veronica had sat together when the former questioned her friend concerning her opinion of Dr. Claude. The light was here not so brilliant as in the drawing-room, and it was comparatively easy to escape inquisitive glances. Although cousins, they were not completely hidden; they were at all events surrounded by shrubs on three sides, and they could only be approached in front, where a small circular garden table stood before them.

Nathalie, with the view of absorbing Veronica's attention, began to speak with great volubility, although in a low voice, so that her apparent air of mystery might keep any of the other guests at a distance. As it was impossible to speak in this manner without a subject, she chose one with which she was admirably acquainted—the small fortune which she expected her aunt at Verneuil to leave her.

Two of the servants, Nathalie had previously noticed, soon passed through the conservatory with their trays. "What will you take?" said Nathalie to Veronica.

"A cup of chocolate," replied the latter.

Nathalie motioned the servants to approach. Each of the cousins took a cup of chocolate, poured out in their presence, and Nathalie placed hers on the small table before them, trusting that her example would lead Veronica to do the same. The result justified her hopes.

Taking the small bottle from her pocket, and concealing it under her handkerchief, Nathalie proceeded to remove the stopper. At the same moment she leant forward towards Veronica, and called her attention to a magnificent epiphyllum in full bloom, which was on Veronica's left hand. In compliance with her cousin's indication, Veronica turned and looked at the plant, which was really a splendid one, with countless pink flowers forming a long cascade from the summit to the ground.

"Would you believe," said Nathalie, "that among all the things poverty deprives me of, one of those I most regret not having, is a conservatory."

"Etienne has promised me to have a small one built next summer against the drawing-room; it shall be yours as much as mine," replied her cousin.

While these words were being exchanged, a rapid glance enabled Nathalie to perceive that no one was looking at them. Leaning forward almost in front of Veronica, she hid her cousin's cup of chocolate from her view. Then from her right hand, which held the small bottle, she allowed the drops of strophantus, which the latter contained, to trickle into the cup. An instant later she was sitting upright again. "Let us drink our chocolate," she said. And again anxious to set an example, she began to stir up the contents of her cup with her spoon.

Veronica, impelled by a mechanical impulse, did the same, so that the poison was speedily amalgamated with the chocolate. Nathalie drained her cup in a moment, but Veronica, after a few sips, placed hers again on the saucer; either she did not care to drink it, or else the chocolate did not taste nice.

These surmises flashed across Nathalie's mind, but she prudently refrained from making any remark. Besides, the quantity that Veronica had absorbed would doubtless suffice to produce the effect she desired. "Suppose we go and find your husband," she observed, rising from her seat.

"With pleasure," replied Veronica. "He will be glad to get back again. He did not want to come, and if I had not promised to accompany him, we should have remained at home."

Nathalie, instead of passing on the right hand side of the

table as would have been natural, passed on the left hand side, and in so doing adroitly managed to knock over Veronica's cup, and to spill the remaining chocolate it contained.

Claude was undergoing the ordeal of conversation with the lady of the house, and it was impossible for him to leave at once. Indeed, some little time elapsed before he and his wife set out for home. Nathalie did not accompany them as she desired to stop rather longer, and had arranged with another friend to give her a seat in her carriage on the way back.

On the road Veronica did not speak, she seemed absorbed, benumbed. Suddenly, however, she was seized with an attack of nausea, and leaning out of the window of the carriage, became very sick. "I think," she said to Claude, "that I am going to have an attack like the one of a fortnight ago."

"My darling, what do you feel like?"

"I am stifling."

"Quick!" shouted Claude to Espérance, who immediately urged the horse into a swifter trot.

They soon reached home. Claude carried his wife upstairs, and after undressing her, laid her on the bed. "You are there, I am not afraid," she said, striving with a feeble movement to press his hands.

But if she had all confidence in him, he on the contrary had no confidence in himself. "What was the cause of this attack?" he asked himself. Being powerless to solve this question, which had become a terrible one, he felt really frightened. He had put his wife to bed as he might have done a child. He now began to examine her, auscultating her heart and chest, and feeling her pulse. The beatings of her heart were very irregular; now very frequent, and now exceedingly slow. The pulsations were also irregular and intermittent.

"I feel sick again," Veronica suddenly observed. The attack was plainly following the same course as on the previous occasion: first of all stifling, and then nausea.

"Did you take anything at Lady Barrington's?" asked Claude, as he could find no natural explanation for the symptoms he beheld.

"Yes, a cup of chocolate, or rather two mouthfuls. The servant handed it to me in the conservatory."

"You did not touch a plant or flower? You did not put a leaf or a stalk into your mouth?"

"No," replied Veronica, who was seized at this moment with a fresh attack of sickness.

"When this was over and Claude had laid her head, which he had been supporting, on the pillow, he proceeded to examine the vomited matter; but the hasty inspection he made failed in the least degree to enlighten him. He returned to Veronica's bedside. She had grown weaker. It was impossible for her either to speak or listen without fatigue. Her breathing hitherto noisily laborious, was now only effected by a contraction of the diaphragm. What was to be done?

Claude reflected, and then essayed various means. When at intervals Veronica opened her eyes and saw him leaning over her, her glance beamed brightly for a moment as if to say, "I am not afraid since you are there."

But he, alas, was frightened; frightened of his ignorance and his impotence. And then he felt so grieved, so overwhelmed at beholding the sufferings of his dear wife, his own Veronica—who implored him as it were to cure her, whereas he was powerless to afford her relief. He lost his self-possession, and was incompetent to examine what was passing before his eyes; while as to reasoning, this was quite out of the question. He was no longer a physician but a husband. She was no longer his patient but his wife. Doubtful of himself but not of science, Claude determined to send for another medical man to assist him; and this idea seizing hold of his mind, he said to himself that it would perhaps be better to have two instead of one. Accordingly the servants were despatched in search of Drs. Graux and Marsin—the two medical men of Condé in whom Claude had most confidence. As they would not be labouring under emotion like himself they might perhaps be able to explain what to Claude was an unfathomable mystery.

Both doctors promptly arrived, both of them well pleased at being sent for by this fellow practitioner of theirs, who was such a dangerous competitor, but who needed their advice concerning his wife's health. Graux, on his part, declared that it was a case of *sternalgie*, while Marsin talked a great deal, but arrived at no conclusion. A discussion then took place in a neighbouring room.

Fortunately before long the housemaid came and informed Claude that madame felt better. Leaving his medical associates to their arguments, he hastened back to her bedside. Her eyes were open, and she was able to raise her arms. She threw them round her husband's neck. "It's all over," she said. "As you were happily there and able to attend on me, I wasn't nearly so bad as the first time; and, besides, I wasn't frightened at all."

She spoke the truth. This second attack had been far less violent than the first one; but this was only natural, since she had taken but a quarter of the dose of strophantus poured into her cup—this dose being moreover a smaller one than the first.

VII.

NEVER before in his life had Claude been so painfully perplexed. In his opinion these attacks still remained inexplicable, for Graux's diagnosis and Marsin's remarks had quite failed to enlighten him. Marsin evidently did not know any more than he did himself; whilst as for Graux's views they were plainly incorrect. What conclusion must he come to then?

Having examined and exhausted every possible supposition, Claude found himself face to face with two undoubted facts—the slackening of Veronica's respiration; and the repeated attacks of nausea with which she had been seized. These two symptoms being linked together as they were, would have been sufficiently characteristic to oblige him—had the patient been any other person than his wife—to admit the possibility of poisoning by one of those heart poisons which always provoke nausea, without one being able to assign a satisfactory cause for this sickness. Now, as this suspicion would have inevitably occurred to him if an ordinary patient had been the sufferer, why should he not take it into account, the sufferer being his wife? However improbable the idea might seem he must not cast it on one side without examining it. But how could Veronica have taken this poison, and what poison was it? This was what he must now try and find out, since he was unable to account for these attacks in any satisfactory manner; and he must not allow anything to arrest, or any one to turn him from, his search.

The first thing he would have to do would be to ascertain from Veronica what she had eaten or drank at Lady Barrington's. It is true that he had already questioned her on the subject, but only in an off-hand manner, and, therefore, with the view of establishing his inquiry on a solid basis he decided to speak to her afresh.

In reply to his questions, Veronica repeated that she had only drunk a little chocolate served her by one of the attendants.

"Was this chocolate already poured out," Claude enquired.

"No, it was poured out before us."

"Us?"

"Yes, Nathalie and me."

"Oh, your cousin was with you?"

"Yes, she took a cup of chocolate like I did, and if there was anything the matter with it as you seem to think, it must have upset her as it upset me. You had better go and see her this morning on your way to the hospital, she may need your advice. Illness makes one so selfish that I had not even thought of her."

"I will see her; but, now, answer me. Did you drink your chocolate at once?"

"At once—that is to say, I laid my cup on a little round table that was in front of me, and when it had got cool I drank a little of it."

"Why did you not finish it? Did it taste disagreeable?"

"No—but it was too strong, too thick."

Claude hesitated a moment. "You did not leave your cup at any time?" he eventually asked.

"No, not at all; we were sitting down and we had our cups before us."

"You are certain that nothing could have fallen into your cup?"

"Oh! quite certain."

"Really certain?"

"Quite certain; but why?"

"Nothing, nothing; but I am thinking—"

"You frighten me."

"You mustn't be frightened, darling. You must understand that it is very important for me in my medical capacity to know how your attack originated. I have looked for a cause in your condition and don't perceive it; so now I am trying to find out if there was not an extraneous cause."

"Then I think the first thing for you to do would be to go and see Nathalie."

"Certainly," answered Claude, and he did so without delay.

On his ringing the bell of Nathalie's apartment, the woman who came every day to attend on her, opened the door. "Is Madame Gillet up?" asked Claude.

"Yes, sir."

"Can I see her?"

"I think so. I will go and ask," and with these words the servant showed him into the little dining-room.

Nathalie was evidently not ill. Claude would really have

preferred to have found her in the same state as Veronica, for then there would at least be a natural explanation for the latter's attack. A minute later Nathalie hurried into the room with a scared look on her face—"You here!" she exclaimed.

"Veronica had an attack last night," replied Claude. "She was sick on the way home."

"*Mon Dieu!*"

"And I came to see whether you yourself were not ill."

"I!" And Nathalie looked at him with an air of such perfect surprise and complete frankness that Claude lowered his eyes.

"As I could not find a natural explanation for this attack," he continued, "I asked myself whether the chocolate you both drank at Lady Barrington's did not contain some toxical ingredient."

"I have not been at all indisposed," answered Nathalie, "and if there was anything poisonous in the chocolate, I should have been in a much worse state than Veronica, for she only drank half her cup, whereas I drained mine." It was impossible to answer more frankly, more completely, giving details which he had not even asked for.

Claude, already very agitated and not daring to ask the questions which the logic of circumstances suggested to him, remained for a moment embarrassed, but Nathalie did not allow him time to reflect. "How is Veronica?" she asked.

"She is well this morning."

"Was the attack she had like the previous one?"

"It was of the same character."

"Was she stifling then?"

"There was a slackening of the action of the heart and she was also sick."

"Frequently?"

"Twice only."

"Then the attack was less violent than last time?"

"I think so."

"What a blessing you were with her!"

"So far as attending on her, it was, no doubt; but as for ascertaining the cause of this attack my presence was of no utility whatever."

"Then you are still unable to explain these attacks."

"Yes."

"But that's terrible: for if you cannot discover the cause, you cannot, it seems to me, prescribe the remedy."

"I am prosecuting an inquiry at present. Now, however, that I find you in good health my only resource is to analyse the vomit which I have carefully preserved."

"You hope that will enlighten you?"

"It probably will." In thus replying Claude glanced furtively at Nathalie. "At all events it is possible that it will," he added, "for a chemical analysis reveals a great many things."

Although Nathalie did not believe that these questions and remarks were dictated by suspicion—by a resolute suspicion—she nevertheless felt anxious at the turn the conversation was taking. Claude was evidently at his wit's end, and in his perplexity was trying everything to arrive at the truth, even allowing himself to imagine things which his reason probably told him were absurd or impossible. Nathalie knew that honest natures are always timid accusers, and that scruples of many kinds prevent their adopting a line of action which their conscience revolts against. As Claude was unable to assign a cause for these attacks, he was reduced to try and find out under what circumstances they had occurred, and he had of course been able to remark that on the first occasion she, Nathalie, was present at Veronica's lunch, just as in the second instance she was by his wife's side when the latter drank the chocolate which he conjectured to have contained some poisonous ingredient. Between the observation of these facts and the conclusion that she, Nathalie, had introduced this poisonous ingredient into the chocolate, considerable distance intervened; still Claude might be on the scent, following the path with hesitating, uncertain steps. If he were to be turned back at all, this would be only accomplished by a calm attitude, and a display of frankness and simplicity. If his last words concealed a threat it was best to ignore it. No doubt the situation was both a difficult and perilous one; still, with a little tact, and a large amount of coolness, she might extricate herself from it with success. It would not be the first time in her life that she had succeeded in dispelling Claude's doubts.

"Did you not analyse the matter I preserved to show you, after Veronica's first attack?" enquired she. As Nathalie asked this question she looked Claude steadfastly in the face. It was her desire to show that the prospect of an analysis did not in the least degree frighten her, since she herself had, on a previous occasion preserved the matter for him to examine. Poisoners do not usually act in this manner. Their first care

is to destroy all traces of the crime, which they fancy might lead to their detection.

"No," replied Claude, "I didn't. I merely made a superficial examination, not a chemical analysis as I shall now undertake, and which I shall follow up with physiological experiments."

"Like you," said Nathalie, "I hope with all my heart that whatever you may undertake will enlighten you as to the cause of these attacks, for it is really dreadful to think that poor Veronica, the wife of a doctor, of a scientific man like you, should not have proper advice. It is positively frightful."

There remained a last observation for Nathalie to make and complete the system which she had adopted; but it was so grave a one that, for a moment, she hesitated. It was only the conviction that the remark was absolutely necessary, that led her to open her lips again. "But," said she "if the analysis does show you the cause of this last attack, I cannot quite understand how it would explain the former one."

"Since our marriage," replied Claude, "Veronica has had four attacks including the one of last night; but, the two first were not of the same kind as the two last. Although the precise cause of the former ones may be difficult to determine, they are on the whole explicable, having regard to the general state of her health. On the other hand, the two last attacks are very much alike, and evidently spring from the same cause—but that cause remains for the present a mystery."

"What I don't understand," rejoined Nathalie, "is how the analysis of the matter vomited last night can explain the preceding attack. If Lady Barrington's chocolate contained some poisonous ingredient (which is very improbable for I who drank far more than Veronica have not been at all indisposed), and if that ingredient caused last night's attack; the preceding one cannot be due to the same cause, since on that day Veronica did not drink any of the same chocolate."

"In a matter of experiment," answered Claude, "one must neither display too much haste, nor indulge too much in imagination. If the analysis reveals to me the cause of Veronica's last attack, I shall then try and find out what caused the first one, with a great many chances of success in my favour."

"Can I go and see Veronica this morning?" asked Nathalie, without replying to Claude's last remark.

"She is resting, and after such a bad night, she must remain very quiet."

“ Then I will only go and see her about your lunch time.”

Claude took his departure, leaving Nathalie very well satisfied with the turn she had given to the interview. Thanks to her self-possession, she had escaped a great danger. No doubt two threats remained suspended above her head : the chemical analysis and the physiological experiments ; still they did not appear to her to be of a very terrible nature. The analysis would in all probability yield no traces of the poison ; while as for the physiological experiments, Veronica had absorbed so small a quantity of strophantus, that they would scarcely produce a characteristic result. It was, indeed, lucky that Veronica had not emptied her cup at Lady Barrington's, and also that she had been taken sick on her way home in the carriage !

VIII.

CLAUDE, it must be remembered was a doctor not a chemist. He therefore, had no intention of making the chemical analysis he had spoken of himself. The matter was so momentous, that he felt he could not trust himself to undertake so delicate a task. Accordingly, he divided the vomited matter he had preserved into two parts, one of which he determined to send to Paris to be analysed by one of his friends, a skilful analytical chemist ; whilst with the remainder he would himself experiment on a number of animals, in the hope that the symptoms they manifested would enlighten him as to the nature of the poison Veronica had taken.

On returning home after his visits, he sat down before his writing-table, took a sheet of note paper and wrote as follows :—
“ Monsieur Vandam, Assistant Toxicologist, at the School of Chemistry, Paris.

“ My dear Vandam,—I forward you a jar containing certain substances which I beg you to analyse as carefully as you can. You will perceive that the substances in question have been vomited during an attack of nausea. Being unable to discover the causes of this attack, which occurred after a slackening of the heart, I am obliged to fall back on the supposition—a vague one it is true—that it may have been caused by some poison, a poison of the heart. Try and discover which it is. In the meantime, with the remainder of this matter which I have kept

back I will make a series of physiological experiments, with the result of which I will acquaint you. As regards yourself, I must renew my request that you will make your analysis with all possible care ; and by appealing to your sentiments of friendship I feel sure that you will act in accordance with my desire. This is not a question of sending a criminal to the scaffold, but rather one of saving a victim. Your most sincere friend.

“CLAUDE.”

Whilst the chemical analysis was being made in Paris, Claude proceeded to experiment on various dogs and rabbits. But he was unable to obtain any proof of the presence of a poison in the vomited matter. In some instances a slight trouble in breathing, and a momentary irregularity in the beating of these animals' hearts showed itself ; but there was nothing sufficiently characteristic for Claude to conclude that Veronica had been poisoned. Indeed, he was obliged to form a contrary opinion, for he did not know that Nathalie enlightened by the violent effects of the first dose had made the second a smaller one. Then again, Veronica had only absorbed about a quarter of this second dose ; and during her first attack of sickness—out of the carriage window—she had vomited the greater part of the poison she had taken. These circumstances combined made Claude's experiments virtually worthless, and ignoring them he was obliged to resign himself to the belief that his suspicions had been unfounded.

Vandam's reply strengthened him in this conclusion. The Parisian toxicologist wrote as follows :

“My dear Claude,—The result of the analysis to which I have subjected the matter you sent me has proved a negative one. It is certain that this matter does not contain any toxic mineral substance ; and it is also *most probable* (I underscore these words) that it does not contain any organic poison. At all events, I am sure that none of those which chemistry can detect, in the present state of science, form a part of the matter in question. I am too occupied to send you the *résumé* of my notes to-day. I will copy them out and forward them to you shortly.

“I think you did wisely in only vaguely supposing that poison had been administered. Look elsewhere, doctor, and may science come to your assistance.

“I remain cordially yours—you happy man, living in the country, married, beloved, and wealthy. I think I may be allowed to envy you. For myself, I am neither rich, nor mar-

ried, nor beloved, but, on the other hand, I have been dreadfully abused on account of my last book. If it is not enough to dishearten me in my efforts to arrive at the truth, it is at all events sufficient to induce me to keep the result of my investigations for myself in future. "J. VANDAM."

Thus the chemical analysis like the physiological experiments seemed to indicate that no poison had been administered. Claude felt greatly relieved that such was the case; for if, on the contrary, this scientific inquiry had indicated that Veronica had been poisoned it would have been necessary for him to discover who had poisoned her—a prospect well calculated to fill him with dismay. Nathalie had reasoned correctly when she remarked to herself that honest folks are timid accusers and that their scruples lead them to reject an idea which their own consciences revolt at. It was in his medical capacity, and not as an ordinary individual, that Claude had suspected a case of poisoning. But if as a man he felt relieved by the negative result of the investigations, as a doctor he remained in a positive state of anguish. If the slackened beatings of the heart and the attack of sickness were not caused by poison, to what circumstances could they be attributed? Claude thus found himself once more at his starting point having gone the round of a circle from which there was no outlet.

What should he, what could he, do if Veronica had another attack? How ought she to be treated? The second attack had been less violent than the first, but it was by no means evident that a third one, if it occurred, would be less violent than the second; on the contrary it might be more violent, it might be disastrous, it might—Claude paused in his reflections. The idea that occurred to him was so terrible that he felt positively frightened.

What, his wife, his dear Veronica, she who loved him, she whom he loved, must suffer, die perhaps without his being able to relieve her! And yet he was a doctor. She relied on him for everything—quite as much for life as for happiness. Such an eventuality was enough to terrify him. He must therefore continue to prosecute his investigations, he must discover the cause of this mysterious illness. But in which direction was he to turn? What cause could he discover? Eventually he had to ask himself whether after all he had not been mistaken when he ausculted Veronica the first time, if she had not then really been suffering from a complaint of the heart which his emotion had prevented him from detecting. It is true that he had aus-

culted her again since then and that he had perceived no signs of this complaint. But if he was then not under the influence of emotion he might have been swayed by a preconceived idea. Does it not often happen that after a first mistake one perseveres in one's error in all good faith and sincerity, utterly failing to discover that one is at fault?

Whether it was emotion, obstinacy, habit, or ignorance that had influenced him, one thing remained certain—namely, that he was quite powerless to discover what was the matter with his wife. He could not afford, either for her sake or his, to remain in ignorance any longer. If he were mistaken, his error must be made apparent to him. If he failed to see, some one must open his eyes. It was useless for him to appeal for advice and assistance to any of his fellow-practitioners at Condé. He had done so in a crisis, in one of those moments of despair when the drowning man clutches at a straw; but at present he must address himself to one whose scientific attainments are beyond question, and who would speak with sufficient authority for him, Claude, to accept his opinion as the truth. It was only in Paris, from one of his old masters, that he could obtain the information he sought for. Accordingly, he must set out for Paris immediately.

When Claude spoke on the subject to Veronica, the latter began by trying to dissuade him from carrying out the project he had in view. "I don't want to have any other doctor than you," she said, "what's the use? You are equal to the best, and no one will ever listen to me and look at me like you do."

"It is precisely because I listen to you and look at you with such strong interest," replied Claude, "that my looks and my listening lead me astray. My emotion and my affection combined prevent my noticing what others would perceive. Of course there is nothing serious the matter with you, but there is one point I need to be enlightened on, and when Carbonneau has given me his opinion, the whole affair will be at an end."

It was not in Veronica's nature to be obstinate or to try and thwart her husband's will. For herself, she was by no means anxious to see Carbonneau, but as Claude wished to have his old master's opinion so as to set his mind at ease, she would willingly allow herself to be examined by him. And then would they not go to Paris together? The journey seemed to indicate such a prospect of happiness, that she would have consented to see all the doctors of the city, one after the other, if Claude had only desired her to do so.

IX.

WHEN Claude had arranged with Marsin to take his place at the hospital and to attend on his patients while he was away, he set out for Paris in company with Veronica. With the exception of Nathalie, who learnt the truth, they told everybody that it was a pleasure trip they were bent upon.

Such indeed it appeared to be in Veronica's eyes—the most delightful trip she had ever made—for was it not the first time that she had journeyed with her husband? She dismissed from her mind the thought that she was going to Paris to consult a doctor, a famous one, an oracle of science, and that her health was the motive of the journey. She had only one idea. She was cognisant of only one fact, the pleasure in store for her, the joy of being with Etienne, of their walking about together, of her having all manner of things with which she was not acquainted shown and explained to her. She was yet sufficiently young to be ignorant of a great many things, and so no dearth of novelties and surprises were awaiting her; and she would have the happiness of enjoying them in the society of the husband whom she so tenderly loved.

So as not to abandon his patients during too long an interval, Claude decided to leave Condé by the diligence, starting at ten o'clock in the morning and meeting the train from Granville to Paris at 11.35. He would thus be able, before starting, to go to the hospital, and to attend on those patients who most required his care. While Claude was perambulating Condé, Veronica proceeded to the diligence office and seating herself in the coupé of the vehicle, awaited her husband's arrival. He reached the Place St. Etienne punctual to time, but she was already getting anxious, asking herself whether he had been delayed, and who could have possibly detained him.

They were alone together in the coupé, the conductor closed the door, the postilion cracked his whip and off they went. The vehicle passed along the streets full of people, and on the door-steps of the shops and houses stood many of the townsfolk watching it go by. Veronica did not therefore dare to throw herself into her husband's arms as she would have liked to have done, but in lieu thereof she seized his right hand, and carrying it to her lips, covered it with tender kisses.

They had not much time at their disposal before reaching the station, so directly they got clear of the houses Veronica pulled out of a handbag she had with her, a couple of napkins, one of them rolled round a bottle of white wine, and the other round a bottle of St. Galmier water. They each of them spread one of the napkins on their knees and then luncheon began. Veronica had prepared a perfect feast—ham-sandwiches, the wings and breasts of fowls, a piece of gruyère cheese, and some russet apples. How nice everything tasted and how pleasant it was to drink out of the same glass. It was she who held the glass and Etienne who poured out the proper proportions of wine and water, and it was necessary to profit of a moment when the vehicle was comparatively steady, so as to drink without choking or without spilling the contents of the glass.

In the train, a gratuity to the guard secured them a compartment to themselves all the way to Paris—leaving them free to clasp each other's hands, to talk together as they would have done at home, whilst the landscape flitted before their eyes, whenever their eyes deigned to look out of the carriage window. When the train reached the St. Lazare Station, they both gave vent to the same exclamation of surprise. "What, Paris already!"

"This journey has been a dream," said Veronica, "a beautiful dream. What a pity we could not go on to the end of the world."

"But when we got there?"

"Oh then we could have come back again."

It was five o'clock and consequently too late to see Carbonneau the same evening. At half-past five they reached the Grand Hôtel. "Are you tired?" asked Claude.

"Not at all."

"Then you can sit up late?"

"As late as you like."

"Well then, you had better dress. After dinner we will go to the theatre."

"In a box of our own?" asked Veronica.

"Most certainly," her husband replied.

Before the performance, he took her to dine at the Café Riche, and the dinner was as charming as their luncheon had been. Veronica had been in Paris several times during her father's lifetime, but M. Lerissel's peasant education inspired him at all times with a prudent reserve so far as money was concerned, and he would have considered himself ruined had he crossed the threshold of the Café Reche, or the Café Anglais.

When he did not have his meals at the hotel, he took his daughter to one of the restaurants in the Passage Jouffrey or the Passage des Panoramas, where he had the satisfaction of dining at a fixed price without the worry of a bill. Those noisy overcrowded establishments had none of the discreet comfort of the private room into which Claude and Veronica were now shown. They seated themselves in front of a table lit up with candles in branching candelabra, and standing nigh to a fireplace in which a trio of logs were brightly burning. Nor had the busy waiters who in times past attended on Veronica and her father any point of resemblance with the gentleman in evening dress, who stood before them now in a dignified attitude, a pencil and a slip of paper in his hand, waiting their orders as if they were the only people in the whole establishment whom he had to attend upon.

Veronica was amazed at the ease with which Claude, in a few words, arrived at a full understanding with this imposing personage. "One can see that you are quite at home," she remarked when the door had been softly closed.

"This is the first time in my life that I have ever been here," replied Claude. "As you may guess when I used to dine off a penny roll I did not come and eat it at the Café Reche and wash it down with a bottle of wine costing twenty francs. I made the water of my filter serve instead."

After dinner, they only had to cross the boulevard to reach the Opéra Comique ; and it was hand in hand that they sat and listened to the soft and graceful music of the *Pré aux Clercs*. Veronica knew this music well enough and yet it seemed to her that she was now listening to it for the first time.

On the morrow, at Carboneau's consulting hour they repaired to the Place Vendôme, where the eminent physician occupied a superb apartment facing the Ministry of Justice. As they went upstairs together Claude felt that his wife's arm was trembling. "What is the matter ?" he asked with affectionate solicitude.

"I am frightened."

"But you mustn't be frightened of Carboneau ; although his manner may be rather rough, he is the best of men and was always very kind to me."

"Oh, I am not frightened of Monsieur Carboneau, but because you seem so serious and pre-occupied."

They had reached the landing and Claude did not make any rejoinder. Indeed, what could he have said ? He knew that he

was unable to hide his feelings. At the same time, he was gratified that Veronica should have likened his positive anguish of mind simply to pre-occupation.

There were already several persons seated in the large drawing-room, and accordingly Claude gave his card to a servant, asking him to take it to his master. When a doctor calls upon another member of the profession he enjoys the privilege of precedence over any patient who may be waiting, so that Claude and Veronica were at once shown into a small apartment where they did not remain alone for long. The door soon opened and a tall elderly man, whose long white hair fell behind over the collar of his buttoned-up dress coat, walked towards Claude with out-stretched hands and smiling face. This was the famous physician, Carbonneau. "Good day, Claude, my fine fellow. How are you?" he asked.

Claude introduced his wife, and then Veronica felt a look as piercing as a needle enter her eyes and descend into her frame.

"Yes, yes," said Carbonneau, "I heard you were married and I should have written to you if our life allowed us to perform the customary duties of politeness or friendship; but the congratulations I did not send you then, I willingly offer you now, and they are all the heartier my dear fellow, now that I have seen your charming wife." Carbonneau spoke with easy grace and Veronica was delighted at the compliment, which, coming from such a man, must, she felt, be a very agreeable one for Claude. "My eyes show me that she is beautiful and full of health," continued Carbonneau, "and my intuition leads me to conclude that she is good and affectionate."

"Still, it is on account of her health that I have come to consult you, my dear master."

"Pooh!"

Claude nodded his head affirmatively.

"Then, if that is the case," resumed Carbonneau, "let us go into my study." And offering his arm to Veronica he led her to the apartment in question, passing on the way through a number of rooms which, with their artistic furniture, tapestry, paintings, bronzes and marble statues, formed as it were a perfect museum.

When the great physician had seated himself in his arm chair, having Veronica in front of him, he listened to Claude without once interrupting him and without allowing any movement of his features to betray what he might think. It was only when Claude's explanations were over that he began to speak, ques-

tioning Veronica concerning her parents and her infancy. An auscultation succeeded these enquiries.

Before he spoke again, but by a glance he gave, Claude considered that he might in a measure set his mind at ease. A sigh of content, which he did not think of restraining, at once escaped him, showing how great his emotion had been.

"The old professor was not mistaken when he spoke of your health," said Carbonneau. "If you have been nervous, be so no longer, my dear, you have yet many years of happiness in store for you."

"If I have been nervous," replied Veronica, "it was because I was afraid of not making my husband as happy as he deserves to be. I was afraid of worrying him. A doctor's wife hasn't the right to be ill."

"With a little care you won't be ill. It is on the subject of your case that I should like to say a few words to your husband if you will allow me."

So saying, Carbonneau motioned to Claude, and taking him to the further end of the room, into the recess formed by a window, he exclaimed in a low voice :—"The mother goutty, the daughter subject to sick headaches—incipient rheumatism—may eventually be threatened with cardiopathia though the heart is at present but slightly affected. Take precautions against a contraction of the aorta—I will write to you on the subject. Don't worry your charming wife : as well to avoid all unnecessary excitement and emotion." They walked back towards Veronica, and Claude made an effort to compose his face so that his wife might not see how troubled he was by what his old master had told him.

Carbonneau expressed the desire to escort Veronica back to the hall and offered her his arm as he had done when conducting her to the study. They walked slowly, and he began to talk of Claude, who was behind them. "Do you know what I am saying to Madame Claude," exclaimed Carbonneau, suddenly looking round. "I am telling her that yours is a brave heart, that you are an intelligent fellow with an admirable character, and if I repeat these words to your face it is that the wife who loves you may carry away with her this opinion of the master who saw you at work and knew how to appreciate you."

If Veronica had dared she would have flung her arms round Carbonneau's neck and kissed him. "Well," said she to her husband when they were outside in the Place again, "are you at ease now ?"

"Yes darling," he answered, "I am full of confidence."

"Then why should we go back to Condé at once? why not send a telegram to M. Marsin, and let us stop and enjoy ourselves in Paris?" On the morrow she repeated the same request, and again on the following day. She could not apparently reconcile herself to the idea of leaving Paris, as if she had some presentiment which warned her that she had better not go back to Condé. However, it became absolutely necessary to return.

"The recollection of these few days will fill my life," she said as the diligence drew up on the Place St. Etienne, "when you are obliged to go out and leave me alone I shall amuse myself with thinking of our trip to Paris."

X.

DIRECTLY Nathalie heard of Veronica's return she called at the house on the Boulevard du Château to learn what Carbonneau had said. The great physician's opinion was fraught with sufficient import for her to be desirous of knowing what it was without delay. Had Carbonneau had any suspicions? Had he designated any especial complaint?

But in reply to her cousin's enquiries, Veronica was only able to repeat Carbonneau's words:—"If you have been nervous be so no longer, you have yet many years of happiness in store for you."

Had he been sincere in speaking thus? thought Nathalie. Had he not rather made this remark with the view of dispelling any alarm Veronica might have felt. Claude alone could answer these last questions, and so Nathalie spoke to him on the subject directly she had the opportunity of being alone with him for a few minutes. But he answered her much as Veronica had done. With a little care he said, these attacks would become less violent and finally disappear. This was all he would tell her, and in presence of his manifest reserve she thought it prudent not to insist.

If Claude did not tell her the truth, it was not with the view of saving himself from the admission that he had made a mistake when he originally stated that Veronica was free from any heart complaint. In the first place, it was by no means proved to him that when he made that statement, this complaint was

so well defined that a diagnosis of it might then have been made. Besides, even if he had made a mistake, he was not the man to shrink from owning it. But then if the symptoms which Carbonneau feared should one day show themselves, it was of supreme importance that Veronica should not at that moment suspect the gravity of the disease with which she was afflicted ; and to make sure on that point, every precaution must be taken. No doubt, Nathalie would not brutally go and tell her cousin what she had learnt, but an indiscretion or a blunder of some kind might open Veronica's eyes, and such an eventuality must be guarded against. Nathalie was not a mother whom it was his duty to warn of her daughter's illness. Veronica was his wife, and the duty of watching over her health and attending on her, belonged to him alone.

Despite Veronica's insignificant answers, despite Claude's evident reserve, Nathalie did not, however, admit herself to be beaten. Claude's reserve was in her eyes a proof that Carbonneau had not merely talked of his taking care of Veronica, but that he had detected something serious in her condition. What had he detected ? What was this something ? It seemed difficult, almost impossible, to arrive at the truth. It appeared certain, however, that Carbonneau had not suspected the real facts of the case, and that if Veronica's condition had appeared a serious one, he had attributed it to natural causes. Claude's attitude seemed to authorize this conclusion. He had been nervous and pre-occupied while the vomited matter was being analysed ; but after the analysis had given a negative result, his manner became more natural and trustful. Such it had remained since his return from Paris. Now if Carbonneau had had any suspicions, Claude would not have been able to conceal them. After the analysis and the physiological experiments, he ceased to believe that Veronica had been poisoned, and it seemed as if that theory was equally far from his mind at present. Carbonneau had been routed quite as effectively as Vandam ; the physician and the chemist were alike defeated. And Nathalie said to herself that, given the precautions she had taken, this result had all along been inevitable.

Many gross clumsy cases of poisoning escape a doctor's attention. Hence those which are carried out in a prudent scientific manner have every chance of success in their favour. Nathalie accordingly felt reassured on this point, an all important one ; but it remained for her to try and guess what complaint Carbonneau had noted when he examined Veronica.

A person who is ill usually takes medicine of some kind or another. Accordingly she must find out what medicine Veronica was taking. This medicine would indicate the complaint, just as the complaint called for the medicine. Accordingly she began to visit Veronica every day—in the morning, in the evening at all hours, for she could not frankly ask her cousin if she was taking anything and what it was. It was necessary that the discovery should be made in an indirect manner. For a whole week she vainly prosecuted her investigations, going so far as to rummage in every drawer or cupboard, to which access could be had when Veronica was out of the way. One morning, however, when she had remained rather longer than usual, almost until lunch time, she suddenly noticed a gesture of regret on the part of Veronica, followed by an exclamation. "What is the matter?" asked Nathalie.

"Why, while we have been gossiping, I have forgotten to take my pill. Etienne will surely scold me."

"Oh, so you are taking pills then?"

"Yes, every day, one an hour before luncheon, the other an hour before dinner."

"What pills are they?"

"I don't know."

"What, you don't know?"

"No—Etienne brought me a box and told me to take one in the morning, and one in the evening regularly."

"And you do so without knowing what they contain?"

"What's the use of my knowing? He prescribes for me, I don't prescribe for myself."

Nathalie had thought for a moment that she was about to obtain her object. But Veronica's last words showed her that she had been deceived. Still she did not consider herself beaten.

"Have they a nasty flavour?" she asked.

"If I keep the pill long in my mouth it is awfully bitter; but if I swallow it at once it has no taste at all." Besides, they are all coated with silver leaf."

"Are they difficult to swallow?"

"Oh no, with a drop of water it's easy enough."

"Well, you had better make haste and take one now."

"It's too late, Etienne will be coming in to luncheon."

"And if he doesn't come in just yet? In your place I'd take my pill and have the luncheon put back a little. He wouldn't be annoyed at that."

"Do you think so?"

"If I were in your place that's what I'd do."

"All right then I will, good-bye !" And so saying Veronica left the room to go upstairs.

Nathalie followed her. "You are coming up ?" asked Veronica looking round.

"I am anxious to see how you manage," replied Madame Gillet. "For my part I was never able to swallow a pill." What Nathalie really desired to see was where these pills were kept and what was the label on the box.

Veronica took this box out of a drawer to which there was no lock—a drawer in which she usually kept her note paper, envelopes, and cards.

"Have you never looked to see what's written on the label ?" asked Nathalie.

"Oh yes. It says 'Pills according to the prescription No. 31, 457,'" replied Veronica. And having singled out one of the pills she replaced the box in the drawer. She then poured a little water into a glass, put the pill in her mouth and swallowed it. "It's very easy," she said, "as you can see."

"Certainly, but in your place I should be more curious than you are. I should like to know what I am swallowing."

"Why ?"

"One likes to know of course."

It would have been very imprudent for Nathalie to insist any further on the subject, for her curiosity might have puzzled Veronica. Accordingly, she said nothing more and left the house greatly disappointed at having failed to discover what these pills were composed of. Still, she was in hopes that later on she might by some means or other acquire this information. Despite her curiosity, she allowed several days to elapse before speaking again on the subject. At length one morning she resolved to renew her inquiry. "Are you still taking your pills ?" she asked.

"Oh yes, it seems I must do so for some little time to come. By the way I know what they are made of. I asked Etienne. It is digitalis."

Nathalie was sufficiently well acquainted with medical matters to know that digitalis is especially employed for diseases of the heart. Therefore Carbonneau had evidently detected in Veronica a complaint of that organ, and if Claude had remained so reserved, it was that he might not have to admit the existence of this complaint which he had previously denied. The strophantus had therefore produced its effect ; and all the doctors,

even the most skilful ones, would now believe in a naturally diseased heart.

No doubt this alone was a result well calculated to inspire Nathalie with confidence in the success of her baneful enterprise, but there was yet another circumstance in her favour. Every one knows that if digitalis is a remedy in cases of a diseased heart, it is also an active poison and a very weak dose of it suffices to kill either man or beast. When Veronica succumbed to strophantus, her death would be first of all explained by a natural cause—a complaint of the heart. And if this explanation did not suffice, if fresh chemical and fresh physiological experiments took place, the digitalis would conceal the presence of the strophantus, and all the responsibility would be cast upon the former poison.

Nathalie did not know whether it was possible to distinguish in a precise manner the effects produced by digitalis from those occasioned by strophantus, which latter had never been studied on a human organism ; but it appeared evident to her that such a distinction would prove very difficult, if not impossible, in the present case, the digitalis being more or less mixed up with the strophantus, the presence of which there would be no reason to suspect, and of which, moreover, no traces would be detected in the analysis.

Thus everything seemed to point to her plan proving successful and that impunity would be assured her. She would not even be suspected. Under such circumstances she had only to persevere in the execution of her design without either hesitation or weakness.

XI.

If everything seemed to indicate to Nathalie that impunity would be assured her it was on condition that she herself should neglect no needful precaution. It was pretty certain that the poison would not be detected afterwards ; still it was very necessary that the person who administered it should be neither detected nor suspected beforehand. This was the difficulty, a difficulty which had already twice presented itself. It had been easily got over in the first instance. It had been surmounted with a certain amount of trouble on the second

occasion, but it seemed far more difficult to overcome in the present position of affairs.

Nathalie could no longer entertain the idea of pouring the poison more or less boldly or skilfully into a cup or plate as she had hitherto done. This expedient had been an excellent one on the first occasion before any suspicions were awakened ; but it was different in the second instance when attention was already aroused ; and it would prove most dangerous if resorted to again, after Claude's various investigations. Although his researches had been abandoned after the negative result of the chemical analysis and the physiological experiments ; although his vague and undecided suspicions had died out since the visit to Carbonneau, who ascribed Veronica's attacks to a natural cause, still his researches and his suspicions alike, might again be called forth, at the moment of the final seizure. And then might not the former become feasible and the latter more precise, and thus lead to a positive result ?

If there were any direct and immediate intervention on Nathalie's part, if she were near Veronica at the moment of this decisive attack, she would certainly be suspected. No doubt she would be able to allay those suspicions ; but that was not sufficient ; they must never be aroused. How then was her design to be realised ? It would have occurred to some to have the poison administered by a third party. But Nathalie never entertained such an idea for a single second. Her pride would never stoop to win an accomplice, to enter into explanations, to conclude a bargain. She had her reasons to act as she was acting—reasons that made her seem innocent in her own eyes, but she would never consent that another should judge the justice of her cause. Besides, what confidence could she place in an accomplice ? Being fully determined not to resort to this dangerous and degrading expedient, she endeavoured to think of another, but without success ; passing numerous combinations in review, but without approving of any of them.

Had she reached this point, she asked herself, only to be overtaken by miserable failure, due to her own weakness and poverty of ideas ? This feeling might have crushed another, but with Nathalie it only served to stimulate her, and she determined she would not give up the game. No ! she would not give up Claude either under the influence of fear, or by reason of her limited imagination. She loved him, never had she more ardently longed to make him hers. What he was to Veronica, such should he be to her. And she would discover

some means of attaining this result even were it necessary to seek for it day and night without relaxation, having that one thought in her mind, and incessantly present to her.

For a long while she was plunged in darkness, and whichever way she turned she encountered a barrier she was powerless to pass ; but eventually a gleam of light appeared, small and faint at first, but which soon grew sufficiently bright to light her on her way. It was impossible to imagine an easier or a safer expedient than the one which now occurred to her ; really her mind must have been more than troubled, not to have thought of it before. Veronica took a pill thrice a day. Suppose that in her pill box another pill were placed—not one of digitalis but one compounded of the extract yielded by the seeds of onay—a pill exactly like the others in weight and shape so that one of these latter being removed, the substitution would not be noticed. At a given moment Veronica would swallow this strophantine pill without being aware of its nature, and then she would indeed poison herself. There would be no direct intervention on Nathalie's part, and for additional security she might arrange to absent herself from Condé directly she had placed the poisonous pill in the box. If she were at Verneuil for instance, with her aunt at the moment when Veronica took this pill, who would then ever think of suspecting her? How could the responsibility of the crime be cast on a person who for several days previously was twenty leagues away from the locality where this crime was committed? We are no longer in an age when sorcery is believed in. Spells and compacts with the fiend have had their day. To prove a crime it is necessary to show that it has been perpetrated.

If it were not believed that this rapid death had a natural cause, would it not be necessary to admit that the digitalis had done all the harm? Digitalis taken as a remedy not as a poison ; administered to cure and not to kill. This conclusion would impose itself on every one—on the local scandalmongers, the authorities, on Claude himself. All that would then remain to be done, would be to win Claude back, by consoling him, and he would assuredly allow himself to be consoled and to be won back.

It was easy enough for Nathalie to procure a digitalis pill ; and on the morrow of the day that she had decided on this combination, she was able, during her cousin's absence, to remove one of these pills from the box in the drawer where Veronica kept them. It was of ordinary size, and was coated

with silver-leaf. Although she had never made a pill in her life, she said to herself that it could not be very difficult to make a similar one out of the dried extract of onay which she had already prepared some time back. She would only have to roll a tiny fragment of this extract between her fingers, until it was well rounded, and then coat it over with silver-leaf, as the chemists do by shaking their pills round and round in a little spherical-shaped box. All that she needed for this operation was the little box in question, and some silver-leaf, and accordingly, so as not to excite suspicion, she went to buy them at Caen, purchasing the box at a turner's, and the silver-leaf at an oil and colour shop.

On returning home she first of all occupied herself in making pills of bread crumbs, and soon acquired a skill well worthy of a chemist's assistant. It was impossible to note the slightest difference between the last ones she made, and the pill of digitalis she had stolen. Size, shape, and silvering, they were all exactly the same. She then proceeded to make in the same manner a fresh pill, composed of extract of onay. Having succeeded as she desired, she carefully burnt the spherical box she had made use of, and destroyed the silver-leaf as well as the pill of digitalis.

She next packed up her trunk, and, having dressed, went round to the Boulevard du Château at an hour when she felt certain she should find Veronica alone in her room, working as usual at her layette. "I have come to wish you good-bye," she said, entering the apartment.

"What, are you going away?"

"Yes, I am going to Verneuil to see my aunt who is again unwell."

"When shall you be back?"

"I don't know—in a week or a fortnight perhaps."

"You must be sure and write to me."

"Certainly I will. At Verneuil I shan't have much else to do."

The conversation lasted in this manner for some little time, when suddenly Nathalie asked Veronica to lend her a book which she knew was in the library. Directly her cousin had left the room to fetch the book in question, Nathalie hastened to the drawer where the pills were kept, and having opened the box she emptied it in her hand. She placed the pill she had made at the very bottom, covered it over with the others, closed the box and put it back in the drawer, reaching her

seat again some time before Veronica returned. The interval that ensued enabled her to become perfectly calm.

She had been trembling violently, and a cold sweat had broken out all over her, from head to foot. Her heart seemed to have stopped, beating as if she had swallowed the very pill she had just placed in the box. If she had been obliged to pour out the poison and see Veronica drink it—this time with the view of killing her, not of simply making her ill—she would surely have hesitated, and maybe have relinquished her design. But, placing the poison in that box, and pouring it into Veronica's glass, cup, or plate, were in her eyes different things. She herself would not make Veronica swallow the poison; chance would alone act in the matter. Providence had Veronica's destiny in its keeping. If she were not to die, then Divine intervention would change the treatment she was undergoing before she took the poisonous pill; if it did not change this treatment, then it would be God that sentenced Veronica to death. This thought set Nathalie at ease. She breathed again, and was able to compose her face before Veronica returned.

"Do you know, I could not at first find your book," exclaimed the latter as she re-entered the room. "However, here it is." So saying she handed the volume to Nathalie.

Madame Gillet rose from her seat. She was anxious to leave the house. But Veronica stopped her, wishing to ask her opinion concerning some object of her layette. "When I come back," said Nathalie.

"Oh, in a fortnight! I shall have nearly finished everything by then."

"Good-bye," rejoined Nathalie, walking towards the door.

"What! you are going away for a fortnight without kissing me?"

Nathalie stopped short. Must they not kiss each other since they had always done so, from childhood's days till now, whenever they separated for however brief a lapse of time? Veronica passed one arm around her cousin's neck and kissed her affectionately.

It was for Nathalie to return the embrace. She hesitated for a moment, then, obeying an irresistible impulse, she clasped Veronica to her with both arms, and kissed her as one sister might another. "Good-bye," she said. And with these last words she hastened out of the room. If any one had met her on the stairs, they would have seen that the tears were streaming down her cheeks.

XII.

VERONICA'S attacks, especially the last one, when Claude sent for Doctors Graux and Marsin, had provoked numerous questions and comments among the Condé gossips. "What is the matter with Madame Claude?" the townsfolk asked themselves whenever they met in the street, or at each other's houses. At first her illness was set down as perfectly natural, for Veronica was a young married woman, and no one would have been surprised to learn that she was going to give birth to a child. But her indisposition not following the usual course, people began to remark, "It's very strange," and little by little they arrived at the conclusion that the whole affair was inexplicable.

"Dr. Graux," remarked one individual, "says that Madame Claude is suffering from a complaint which affects her breathing."

"Perhaps so," replied another; "but that isn't Dr. Marsin's opinion. He talks a great deal without saying anything precise, and if you try and force him to speak plainly, he becomes so mysteriously discreet that it is enough to make one feel nervous."

"What does he imagine then?"

"Heaven only knows!"

Forthwith the good people of Condé began to ask themselves why Marsin was so mysterious and discreet. At first precise words were avoided, the speaker merely making insinuations when he was sufficiently intelligent to do so; while, if his mind were a weak one, he shrugged his shoulders and shook his head, with "h'm, h'm," which was intended to imply something very profound.

Claude's friends, moreover, were among those who shrugged their shoulders and shook their heads. They were labouring under a bad impression, but they did not care to express their opinions in formal words. His enemies, however—a numerous class, as may be supposed—did not by any means adopt a similar attitude of reserve. In the first rank among the latter was Dr. Evette, whose animosity and jealousy, instead of dying out, had on the contrary been steadily acquiring additional strength, being especially stimulated by an ill-disguised envy of Claude's success. Was it not enough to make him feel justly

indignant that he, hospital, poor relief, seminary, and convent physician, should have his position undermined by such a rival as Claude, who in less than three years had acquired a preponderant practice, not merely in the town, but in the entire district for ten leagues round? Was there not reason for him to be legitimately jealous of this rival, who, although he might have fewer patients, still made a larger income by his profession, for he knew how to make his patients pay him a good price—a thing which he, Evette, could not do, for convents, priests, pious and relief societies, pay very small doctors' fees, if they pay any at all. Thus it was that an implacable hatred of Claude was fostered in Evette's breast; and it was not merely these everyday grievances that made him anxious for revenge, but also the recollection of their hospital rivalry, the affair of old Dreniper's broken leg, and the famous "roast apple" story. Evette had been obliged to bottle up his hatred during the flood-tide of Claude's success, for he was not a man to strike a fair blow at one who was stronger than himself; but the rumours that now circulated concerning Veronica's inexplicable illness seemed at last to indicate a possible revenge.

Who could explain this strange illness better than a medical man? But Evette carefully avoided giving this explanation, which every one asked him for. In the first place, he did not at all know what this strange illness really was; and even if he had known, he would not have explained it. He was not sufficiently foolish to provide his adversaries with weapons against himself, or to provoke the remark when Veronica's illness was talked of that "Dr. Evette's opinion is so-and-so." It was not his practice to proclaim his opinion aloud. When he wanted to say something very serious he had sufficient skill to make somebody else say it, so that he always had a responsible authority for his utterances. Directly the rumours came to his knowledge, he proceeded to "pump" his fellow-practitioners, Graux and Mursin, who, having examined Madame Claude, were the only people in a position to enlighten him.

Graux adhered to his previously expressed opinion that Veronica was suffering from an affection of the respiratory organs, an angina or something of the kind. Mursin affirmed no opinion at all, but he spoke of the attacks of nausea, the slackening of the movement of the heart, the sufferer's prostration and somnolence which were in his eyes quite inexplicable. Evette was struck with the nature of these symptoms, but instead of drawing any

conclusion from them he began by declaring that it was quite impossible that Madame Claude could be ill at all. Such as he knew her, she was a young woman of a sanguine temperament and robust health, brought up in the country under the most favourable circumstances ; her parents having been strong healthy people. It was true her mother had had the gout and also rheumatism, but that had no importance. In his opinion, therefore, Madame Claude was not seriously ill, there was nothing in her constitution to indicate any chronic complaint. Of course, he was only speaking of illness having a natural cause. Matters would be different if there were causes he ignored, but what causes could there be ? For his part, he could not perceive any. Then those who had questioned him, for he never spoke in the foregoing manner without being questioned, set themselves to work to discover the causes that Dr. Evette had mentioned, although he ignored them ; and after a long search and no end of invention, they thought they knew what these causes were.

"It's all very well," said one, "for Dr. Evette to talk, Madame Claude *is* ill, and indeed so seriously that the last attack almost resulted in her death."

"But then," urged another, "this illness of hers cannot be explained by any natural cause. At least, that is Dr. Marsin's opinion, and he examined her."

"But are there not accidental causes !"

"What ones ? A fall that fractures a limb ? A cold that settles on the chest ? Madame Claude hasn't fallen down, and no one ever heard of her catching a severe cold. Perhaps she may have eaten or drunk something that didn't agree with her. She may have absorbed some poisonous substance."

"Yes, there are cases of doctors who have poisoned their wives."

"Oh, that's absurd." This last remark came from Dr. Evette when the previous observation was made in his presence—more in a jocular than in a serious tone. He, however, chose to look upon it as a serious expression of opinion, and at once became highly indignant. Those who heard him speak declared that they had never seen him so eloquent before.

He stated that it was precisely because Dr. Claude was his adversary and his rival, precisely because they were on bad terms together that he would not allow such a remark to be made even in jest, without protesting against it. No doubt the symptoms which Marsin had remarked were very strange, and

could not be attributed to a natural cause. He quite admitted that. But then he could not bring himself to the conclusion that these symptoms indicated that Madame Claude had been poisoned. No doubt many doctors in the world had been poisoners, and, indeed, this was not to be wondered at, for was it not easy for a medical man to get rid of any one who was in his way by poison? He had every kind of poison at his disposal, and he might combine them so cunningly as to avoid all possible detection. All that was quite true. He was willing to admit it. But he would never admit, as a criminal lawyer once stated, that out of every hundred doctor's wives who did not die of old age, at least fifty were poisoned by their husbands. As long as he had any breath in his body he would protest against so monstrous an accusation. Even were it correct in principle, how could it possibly be applied in Dr. Claude's case? In poisoning a person one has an object. That person must be in your way; there must be something to gain by his or her death, or else one is simply a monster doing harm for harm's sake. No doubt Dr. Claude was not an angel walking upon earth, and in more than one circumstance he had shown that he attached no great importance to human life; but that was owing rather to the detestable education he had received than to his natural feelings. Besides, if he even were a monster of cruelty, it remained to be shown that the young wife, whom he had but recently married, was in his way, or that he had an interest in her death. As long as this was not shown, all honest folks would do well not to indulge in a series of vague accusations based on suppositions, however plausible the latter might seem. For his own part he, Evette, should not think of entertaining them. He knew well enough that Madame Claude had now been married nearly a year, and that there were no signs of her having any children; and perhaps her husband, who was a medical man, might know that she would never have any. But having no children, if she chanced to die without making a will in her husband's favour, Dr. Claude would be obliged to refund her fortune, which was doubtless a great attraction for him, since he had no fortune of his own. A husband with monstrous instincts might of course calculate that it was in his interest for his wife to die young; in fact at a short time after their marriage, when being still in love with him, she would at once make a will in his favour; a thing she would never do later on, when she had learnt to know him better. But then was Dr. Claude capable of making such an abominable calcula-

tion? He, Evette, really did not believe it, despite the slight esteem that he felt for his fellow practitioner.

This insidious defence repeated, in varying tone of voice, and with every variation of detail, that came to the mind of the persons who bruited it about, was not at all calculated to allay the rumours to which Veronica's illness and attacks had given rise. Besides, Evette was not Claude's only enemy, and he, indeed, found plenty of allies whose voices helped to swell the clamour which had arisen throughout Condé. Certain circles had neither forgotten nor forgiven Claude's conduct towards Sister Sainte Juste and the other hospital nurses. Another coterie had neither forgotten nor forgiven the humiliation he had inflicted upon the local tribunal by his attitude at the trial of the brothers' Vilaine, when he informed the amazed court that what the public prosecutor had taken for cerebral matter was merely so much roast apple.

His fellow practitioners detested him because his attainments were superior to theirs. The chemists hated him because he did not favour a lavish consumption of drugs. Some disliked him for one thing, others for another. Jealous minds envied his success. Fools followed suit, out of a spirit of imitation—so that every cock and bull story that was invented concerning him found ears to listen to it, and tongues to hawk it through the town.

Many are the people in the world who foster slander, not with the intention of doing harm, but merely with the view of saying something, of reviving a flagging conversation, or of showing that they are thoroughly acquainted with what is going on. What better subject for gossip and slander could have occurred to the good people of Condé, than this mysterious illness from which Madame Claude was suffering?

XIII.

As often happens in similar cases, those who were being talked about were in utter ignorance of the fact that they were exciting public comment. It is true, that, on several occasions, Claude had noticed that people asked him in a very pressing manner after his wife, and Veronica, on her side, had come to the conclusion that the townsfolk occupied themselves rather too much concerning the state of her health; still, neither of them had

paid any particular attention to the interest they excited. The questions they were asked were on the one hand set down to the natural curiosity of the questioner, and on the other to his friendly solicitude.

Those who were most intimate with the Claudes—Mérault, his wife, and Nathalie—were also questioned by the local scandalmongers, although in a disguised manner; the two former were friends, the latter was a relative, and consequently it was necessary to be very reserved and prudent in speaking to them. Those who made these attempts, even skillfully, met with such a reception from Mérault and Denise, that they abandoned all desire of renewing them. And when insinuations were ventured on in Nathalie's presence, she invariably stopped the speaker at the first word.

It is true, that, in so acting, Mérault and his wife were not actuated by the same motives as Nathalie. The conduct of the former was guided by that sentiment of friendly respect, which resents any attack made against those we esteem; the latter's attitude was inspired by fear, lest a dangerous subject should be broached, and lest some remark of hers, either in one sense or another, should become compromising in the future. Still, if there was a diversity of reasons the result was the same, and Claude and Veronica, Mérault and Denise, together with Nathalie, ignored the rumours so persistently circulating throughout Condé. As for Lajardie, who with his unscrupulous nature, would have listened to everything, discussed everything, and repeated everything right and left, he happened at this moment to be in Hungary purchasing hides for his tannery, so that he was unable to mix himself up in the affair, as he undoubtedly would have done had he been in Condé.

Of all the relatives and more intimate friends of the Claude's, there was only one person who was fully acquainted with the gossip of the town, to whom the scandalmongers, the fools, and the enemies of the young couple dared to repeat aloud the surmises hitherto hawked about in an undertone. This person was Cousin Quite-Well? Belonging as she did to the clerical circle in which Claude counted his most numerous and most active foes, Cousin Quite-Well? who did not scruple on her own part to repeat right and left, and under the slightest possible pretext that she held Veronica's husband in very slight esteem, was, moreover, situated so as to hear all the rumours that were abroad. With her ideas it was not unnatural that she should dislike Claude. Was he not the opponent of good

Dr. Evette, and had he not persecuted Sister Sainte Juste ? Then her friends had told her that his political ideas were of a most subversive character, and above all, she had felt personally offended, by his not asking her to come and manage his house, when he married an inexperienced girl like Veronica. She would have liked to have ruled the roast in his abode, and to have chaperoned his wife in society, so that the deaf ear which Claude had turned to any insinuations she ventured on the subject, had not unnaturally exasperated this old maid, who, with her despotic character, believed herself superior to any other living soul.

Accordingly, when she heard of the accusations being made against Claude, and especially of "good" Dr. Evette's insidious speech in the latter's defence, she at once resolved to speak to "poor" Veronica on the subject. She was not a woman to accomplish such a task in a round about fashion ; as a rule, she even disdained the most elementary oratorical precautions, and as she remarked to herself with some complacency, she always made straight for the object she had in view. Besides, so far as the present case was concerned, she was the head of the family, and it was her duty to look after and protect her relatives.

She therefore set out for Veronica's house, assuming her gravest airs for the occasion, and the children who saw her walking along the Boulevard du Château, robed in black, her head erect and her features perfectly rigid, might reasonably have mistaken her for one of the wicked fairies of the story books, about to present herself at the baptism of some poor little princess over whom she went to cast a spell. "Are you alone ?" she asked Veronica, as she entered the latter's room.

"Quite alone."

"I mean is your husband out of the house ?"

"Yes ; he will only return at dinner-time."

Then only Cousin Quite-Well ? sat down and looking at Veronica attentively, she exclaimed—"And you, are you quite well ?"

"Quite well, thanks."

"No more fresh attacks."

"No."

The old maid now thought fit to shake her bony head several times, but Veronica was unable to divine whether this movement was meant to imply disbelief or discontent. "And how are you getting on together ?" asked Cousin Quite-Well ?

"Oh, perfectly well, of course."

"Then your husband has left off worrying you."

"He never worried me."

The old lady shook her head again, and raised her eyes to heaven. "I mean to say that he gives you more liberty than he did," she rejoined.

"He has always left me the liberty I wanted."

"Why do you hide the truth from me?" continued Cousin Quite-Well? "from one whom you must remember is the head of the family? If your husband always left you all the liberty you desired, why did you leave off coming to Abbé Bernolin's lectures directly after your marriage?"

"Because I preferred remaining with my husband."

"If you had all the liberty you desired, why did you break off your connection with the Sainte Clara Mission and Relief Society as soon as you were married?"

"Because, although my husband is willing to admit that this mission might do good, he is convinced that managed as it is it does more harm than good."

"What an infamous doctrine!"

"I don't enquire into my husband's ideas."

"No, you have to submit to them."

"I adopt them with closed eyes simply because they are his."

"Good heavens! you poor unfortunate girl!"

"Not unfortunate, cousin, but very happy."

Once again did the old maid shake her head, and Veronica could now perceive that her features expressed a mingled feeling of contempt and indignation.

"Well, let's have a last proof of your liberty," she said. "Give me a hundred francs for the Old Paper Mission, founded by Count Piétavoine."

"I am very sorry to have to refuse you, but I cannot give you this sum."

"What, you haven't got a hundred francs after bringing a fortune to your husband?"

"I cannot give you a hundred francs without first asking my husband if he approves of the purpose to which they are to be devoted."

"You would have given them me before your marriage?"

"Certainly I would."

"Then you see how free you are!"

"Before my marriage I only had to account to myself. Now I have to account to my husband. It would not be Veronica

Lerissel who gave you that money, but Madame Claude, and I have no right to engage my husband's name without his consent."

"That will do, I will admit that my application was only a feint. I wanted to see to what extent you are your husband's slave. I am now fully enlightened on that point. Now another question. Have you made a will in your husband's favour?"

"But cousin——"

"Answer me, I beg you. My question is asked entirely in your own interest."

Veronica smiled. "The fact is," said she, "that we two don't seem to look upon my interest in the same light."

"Don't laugh, you unfortunate girl," exclaimed Cousin Quite-Well? "I never asked you a more serious question in my life; now answer me."

Veronica hesitated a moment. She felt hurt by all this cross questioning. She was indignant also at her cousin's evident animosity against her husband. Still as she was accustomed to the old lady's despotic manner, she thought that the best way to get rid of her would be to answer her last question at once. "No," said she, "I have made no will at all."

Cousin Quite-Well? raised her two arms to heaven, and heaved a sigh of relief. "May His Holy name be blessed," she said in a fervent tone. "The Holy Virgin has allowed me to arrive in time!" Veronica looked at her astonished, utterly unable to understand the old maid's last ejaculation. "Well, just don't make a will," continued Cousin Quite-Well?—"never make one; will you promise me not to do so?"

"No, cousin, I can't promise you that."

"But you promised me not to hand your fortune over to your husband by a clause in your marriage contract, and you kept that promise."

"But circumstances are no longer the same."

"Reflect, you foolish girl."

"I have reflected."

"Now listen to my advice, listen to my request. If I ask you not to make a will, you will understand that I am not speaking in my own interest. I am an old woman and you will outlive me; besides if you died intestate I should not be your heir. Nathalie passes before me. But really I am speaking in your own interest, your own interest alone——"

"Cousin," replied Veronica, "I should feel grateful if you would not speak on this subject any further."

"But it is my duty to speak as I am doing, and I *will* speak too. I take God to witness that I did not desire to say what your blindness will compel me to say. If you would only give me the promise I ask you for, I would not say it. The responsibility will be yours, you unfortunate girl, if I have to speak. Now, a last time, I beg of you, give me that promise."

"Never, cousin; for I can perceive that your words are dictated by hostility against my husband, and I should be conspiring with you against him, if I gave you the promise you ask for. Now, that's quite enough. I will neither give you that promise, nor will I hear a single word against my husband."

Despite Veronica's energy, it was impossible for her to impose silence on such a woman as Cousin Quite-Well? "You will remember," exclaimed the old lady, "that your obstinacy alone obliges me to speak."

"But I do not wish you to speak."

"Unfortunate child! I want to save your life! Don't you know that your inexplicable illness has caused a perfect commotion. Your friends, every one who takes an interest in you, in fact the whole town have been trying to discover the cause of your attacks. And now it is found that no natural reason can be given for them, every one understands that if you have been made ill, it is that you may be induced to make your will. When that is made, you will be simply poisoned to death!"

Veronica had scarcely understood the purport of her cousin's first words, but as the old lady finished her phrase, she bounded from off her chair, and exclaimed—"Not another word! Not another word!" Her gesture and her tone were so full of indignation that Cousin Quite-Well? found herself absolutely at a loss for a suitable retort.

Veronica stood for a moment before her. "You have dared to make such an accusation in my presence!" she exclaimed. Then, stretching her left arm towards the door, she continued: "Leave this house, and never enter it again."

Cousin Quite-Well? did not budge.

"Very well," added Veronica, "then *I* will leave the room!" And without once looking round, she walked out of the apartment.

XIV.

SHE hastened downstairs, and shut herself up in her husband's consulting-room as if she had fled from the presence of a murderer. Having hastily bolted the doors, she sank into an arm-chair. A fit of weakness succeeded her access of indignation, and she burst into tears.

Without knowing what she was doing, she closed her eyes and stopped up her ears with her hands so as neither to see nor hear Cousin Quite-Well?—as if the latter were still before her draped in her black shawl, and with her bony hands resting on her merino dress.

But these precautions were quite superfluous. The words she had heard still resounded in her heart and brain, and no effort of will could banish them away. "When your will is made, you will be simply poisoned to death!" What an abominable accusation! To think that there were people capable of making such an infamous charge, people cruel enough to come and repeat it to her.

"In her interest!" In her interest indeed—to tell her that her husband had poisoned her already so as to make her ill, and that he was only waiting for her to make a will in his favour to finish her off.

She had cruelly suffered during those strange attacks, but that suffering was nothing in comparison with the torture she now endured. Those words were burning her, branding her as with a red hot iron.

What infamy, to accuse her Etienne of such a crime—he who was so loyal and so honest; he who was so good to her! What had she done that folks should strike her thus, that they should morally murder her?

How unfortunate she was. At a moment when life seemed full of happiness—when her husband's love was consoling her for her parents' loss; when hope was smiling, and the future fraught with promise—at such a moment a human being had been found to come and tell her that she had merely been living in a dream, that true unalloyed happiness could never be her lot.

Why had this been done? Why should she not be happy? What offence, what crime had she to expiate? Who was it that wanted to be revenged on her? How could she have inspired such a ferocious hatred? And why should those who hated her level their blows at Etienne, who did good on every side. Was this what is called a trial of life, one of those trials by which one gains experience?

Thus it was that Veronica remained throughout the afternoon tortured by her conflicting feelings. During an interval of calm she heard the clock strike. She looked towards the mantel-piece and perceived that it was half-past six. Etienne would now soon be coming home, and it would not do to let him find her in this state; she must dry her tears and try to get calm. She began to walk up and down the room, which was a large one, now passing round the writing-table, now approaching the window, leaning her burning forehead against the cold glass in hopes of thus getting rid of the fever that consumed her. But all her efforts were in vain, and when seven o'clock struck and she glanced at herself in the looking-glass, she found that her eyes were still red, while her lips were constantly contracted by a nervous spasm. She went up stairs, bathed her face with cold water, and smoothed her hair. Half-an-hour afterwards the phaeton dashed into the court-yard. Claude had at length returned. She went to the hall door to receive him.

"Forgive me if I have kept you waiting," he exclaimed, as he sprang to the ground. "I am dying of hunger." Then he took her in his arms to kiss her as was his wont whenever he returned home, and to his surprise he found her trembling. "What is the matter?" he asked, in an anxious affectionate voice.

She did not dare to answer. Perhaps she might speak later on, when they were alone together in their room, though after all it seemed preferable not to speak at all. Why should she deal him the blow which another had inflicted on her? At all events she would not speak just now. He had told her he was dying of hunger, above everything he had better first have something to eat. "The dinner is waiting," she said, taking his hat and overcoat from him, and hanging them up.

They went into the dining-room together and sat down. Claude glanced anew at Veronica with evident anxiety in his eyes. "It's nothing," she answered, as she met his glance, "nothing at all." She unfolded her napkin and took up the ladle to serve the soup, but suddenly she let it fall and threw

herself back in her chair. If Claude had not sprung forward she would have tumbled to the ground. He caught her in his arms, and lifting her up carried her into her room. Then when he had broken the laces of her stays that hindered her breathing, he threw a few drops of cold water on to her face. She started and breathed again ; then throwing both arms round her husband's neck, she burst into passionate sobs.

"What's the matter ? what's the matter ?" asked Claude.

"Oh, its nervousness, don't worry, I shall be all right presently."

But he could not help worrying himself, although this attack was not at all like the preceding ones. He had laid her on the bed, and while she cried without speaking he examined her, feeling her heart and her pulse, while at the same time trying to calm her by kind and gentle words, just as a mother might try to comfort a sick child. Finding his words inefficacious, he rang the bell for some boiling water, and prepared some tisane. Leaving the latter to draw he went down-stairs to his study, and returned with a small phial in his hand. Veronica followed all his movements. She saw him pour the tisane into a cup, and then add to it a few drops of the liquid which the phial contained. Instead of bringing her the beverage, however, he suddenly threw it out of the window with a gesture of discontent.

"Why are you throwing it away ?" she asked.

"Because I poured out too many drops."

"Is what you are giving me so very terrible then ?"

Claude looked at her with manifest surprise, and for a moment they remained gazing into each other's eyes. Then he turned aside to prepare another cupfull ; exclaiming as he did so—

"So you want to know what you are taking, now ; you know, as regards your pills, you worried me until I told you that they were composed of digitalis." While speaking he poured out the tisane and then the drops. Next, approaching the bedside with the cup in his hand, "will you drink that ?" he asked Veronica.

The latter gave him a long look. "I will take anything you give me," she said, and she slowly drank the beverage, without once taking her eyes off him. Then handing him the empty cup, she added—"Now bolt the door, I want to speak to you without our being disturbed." When he had acted in accordance with her desire, she asked him to come and sit at the bed-

side. She was still trembling, but her face, so pale a minute ago, was now suffused with colour.

"Keep calm," said Claude, "keep calm, you shall tell me what you have to say by and bye."

"No," replied Veronica; "I must tell you now what is stifling me, and now, too, you can listen to me."

Claude was surprised at the peculiar character of this remark, but Veronica did not leave him time for reflection. She proceeded to give him a faithful account of Cousin Quite-Well's visit; she told him what the old lady had said and what she had herself answered. She paused, however, on coming to her cousin's last phrase, that she had been told every one in Condé understood she had merely been made ill in order that she might be induced to make her will. Drawing her husband nearer to her, she hid her face on his neck and then repeated in a faint voice Cousin Quite-Well's final words—that directly her will was made she would be poisoned to death.

Claude started backwards, but Veronica had thrown her arms round his neck and pressed him towards her, covering his face with passionate kisses. "Poor child," murmured Claude.

"You pity me," she said. "Yes, the blow was a terrible one; but is it not equally terrible for you, you who are so good, so true; don't think, however, that this infamous accusation made me doubt you for one moment. It would be worse than all the rest if you were to fancy that I doubted you. That is why I only decided upon telling you the whole truth after drinking that cup of tisane you gave me. As for the drug you mixed with it, you shan't even tell me its name. Nothing any one could tell me would ever affect my faith in you. And I think you believe me when I say so, or shall I swear it!"

"No, darling, no. I did not particularly wish you to drink that tisane. You might easily have refused it without vexing me."

"Perhaps so, but it was a pleasure for me to drink it. Now, there is another pleasure that I am going to give myself, and at once too." Claude looked at her. "I want," she added, "to make my will immediately, that famous will that I am begged not to make because I shall die directly I have signed it."

"Oh, don't worry about that," he said, "calm yourself and try and get to sleep. After all this worry you require rest."

Veronica did not insist; but on waking up the next morning

her first word was about the will. "Don't go out," she said, "without telling me how to make it. I am sure you know that I have always considered anything of mine as yours. There was no use in telling you this ; but it may be useful to write it down, so give me a sheet of paper, pen, and ink, and tell me how a will is made."

Claude strove for a long while to dissuade her from her design, but he was eventually obliged to relinquish his opposition. He went into his consulting room to fetch the Code Napoleon, and then read aloud the 970th clause : "Any privately made will must be written from first to last and dated and signed by the testator ; it is not subjected to any other formula."

"Then it's easy enough !" exclaimed Veronica, and jumping out of bed, she put on her dressing-gown, and sat herself down at the table. Taking a pen in her hand she wrote as follows :

"I bequeathe everything I possess to my dearly loved husband, Etienne Claude.—Condé le Châtel, the twentieth of April, eighteen hundred and seventy seven.—VERONICA CLAUDE, *née* LERISSEL."

Handing him the sheet of paper on which she had traced these words, she then exclaimed, "Now I shall be able to answer their accusations by telling them I've made my will, and you see I'm still alive and well. It was indeed necessary I should make it, if not for ourselves, at least so as to stifle slander."

"Perhaps so ; but in order to be alive and well, we shall have to go back to digitalis again. I allowed you to leave off the pills, but after the shock you have sustained it is necessary, to re-regulate that heart of yours."

"Oh," responded Veronica, "I will take anything you like."

XV.

WHEN Claude was able calmly to examine the situation which Veronica's narrative had made him acquainted with, he felt that it would be best to consult a friend, some one who allied prudence with firmness, and in whom he could have full confidence. He was so unnerved by what he had learnt, that it was impossible for him to act without advice. In his hour of need, he naturally bethought himself of Louis Mèrault, and accordingly

without loss of time, he called upon the advocate and apprized him of Veronica's revelations.

At first Mèrault seemed thunderstruck, but after an interval, raising his head, he exclaimed :—"My dear friend, you have a great deal to forgive me, for I am very guilty." Claude glanced at him with surprise.

"Yes, I have been both culpable and clumsy," continued Mèrault, "and I will explain to you in what manner. For some time back my wife and I have had knowledge of various insinuations made against you. Without any preconcerted understanding, but by a spontaneous impulse we met those insinuations in such a manner that they have never been repeated in our presence."

Claude pressed his friend's hand.

"Don't thank me," replied Mèrault, "blame me rather, for we acted like fools, like honest fools as we are. Instinctively aware that we were going to be told something against our friend, we naively closed the scandalmongers' tongues. Delicacy prompted our conduct, but it was none the less foolish. If we had listened to all these insinuations, we might have shown those who made them how false they were, and they would then have vanished in flim air. In such a case they would never have come to your wife's ears nor to your own. However, at present the harm's done, unfortunately."

"Precisely, and that is why I came to consult you. What do you advise me to do? This news has literally unmanned me, and I don't know what course to follow."

"What object have you in view?"

"I'm sure I don't know—at least I want to stifle, to prove the falsity of this slander, but how? I need a pilot, a counsellor, for I'm afraid of myself. Oh, my dear fellow, what an abominable thing calumny is!" So saying, Claude pressed his hands to his head with a gesture of despair.

"My poor friend!" exclaimed Mèrault.

"You pity me, but it is rather my wife, poor child, who needs your pity. I am the accused, but my conscience having nothing to reproach itself with, sustains me; she, however, is the victim, wounded both in her love and faith. He then related how Veronica had acted in reference to the cup of tisane, and how she had insisted on making her will.

"Yes, all that's very horrible; horrible for both of you," said Mèrault. "And I understand so well what must be your anguish, that I really don't know what advice to give you. Who

can we apply to to stifle these calumnies? Where do they come from? Who hawks them about? What are they based on?

"On a fact unfortunately—the strange attacks which Veronica has recently had."

"But were they not explained by your colleagues?"

"Graux explained them, but his explanation was erroneous; Marsin gave no explanation at all, and although I don't for a minute charge him with having brought these accusations against me—he is too loyal a man to do anything of the kind—still they may indirectly emanate from him. He may have said that these attacks appeared in his eyes inexplicable, and others bolder than he is may then have given utterance to an opinion which may be his own at heart."

"But it would be frightful for Marsin to imagine anything of the kind."

"Not so frightful as you might think."

"Why not?"

Claude hesitated for an instant. "We have both of us," he eventually said, "you, as a lawyer, and I, as a doctor, had to deal with people asking for our advice, and who begin by trying to hide something they don't want us to know, although in their own interests it is indispensable that we should know it. Now, I won't follow their example. To-day, I must own to you that I myself entertained the supposition that my wife might have been poisoned."

"By whom, good God?" exclaimed Merault, with intense surprise.

"I did not seek so far as that—I asked myself if this were not a case of poisoning, and therefore you will admit with me that it was possible for Marsin to have done the same. You will understand that, with this idea in my mind, I did not remain without making an effort to arrive at the truth. I made a number of physiological experiments with the matter which Veronica vomited; a portion of it underwent a chemical analysis at the hands of one of my Paris friends, in whom I have full confidence, but we neither of us found any traces of poison. Marsin, however, was in ignorance of what I had done myself, and of what I had caused to be done, so that he may easily have retained his doubts on the subject, and even have allowed them to be surmised. Hence all the harm; you perceive that it is based on a fact which cannot be got rid of; for were I to acquaint Marsin with the result of the investigations, which I

and my friend made, I must also admit that I believed in a case of poisoning, or rather that I considered it possible."

"Would not this have been a case of accidental poisoning?" enquired M^{er}a^ult, with some little hesitation.

"I did not ask myself whether it was accidental or not. I merely endeavoured to find out whether it existed."

"But—"

"Allow me—I was looking for the poison, not for the poisoner; if I had discovered the former I should have prosecuted my investigations further. But how could I admit the possibility of a crime, when I could think of no one capable of committing it?"

"In such an eventuality," observed M^{er}a^ult, "we men of the law should not have acted in the same manner as you did. If we had entertained the idea of poison, we should have admitted the idea of a crime at the same time."

"Fortunately, I did not act so swiftly. To-day I should have been tortured with remorse if my suspicions had at first fastened themselves on any one; for, subsequently, neither my friend Vandau nor myself found any traces of poison."

M^{er}a^ult remained for a moment silent; apparently absorbed in a deep meditation. "I should really have liked," he at length said, "to have been able to give you the advice you ask me for. But, after looking at your situation under every aspect, it seems to me that your wife alone has, with a kind of intuition, hit upon the only course to follow. As you say it is impossible for you to give Marsin any explanations; besides, even if he caused the harm, he cannot now repair it. It is equally impossible for you to give the lie to all your enemies and adversaries, to those who are envious of you, to all the scandalmongers who circulate this slander. Only one thing will stop their tongues, and your wife perceived it when she said, 'I was told I should die directly my will was made; well, it is made, and made in my husband's favour, and yet I am still alive.' This is the plainest demonstration one could hope for, and people will be obliged to admit its value. I would therefore suggest that you should ask your wife to call on that amiable cousin of hers—Quite-Well? don't you call her?—and acquaint her with the result of her would-be prophetic warnings. Such an interview would afford your wife an admirable occasion to revenge herself on her cousin, and, although I am acquainted with Madame Claude's affection and good nature, I hope she will not shrink from the course I propose. You know what a regular old gossip her cousin is."

"Yes, I do, unfortunately."

"Well, within a couple of days you may be sure that the whole town will know that your wife has replied to the infamous insinuations made to her, by drawing up a will in your favour. Of course, one must expect to meet with some obstinate folks, who from time to time will ask with crocodile tears in their eyes, 'Well, and how is poor Madame Claude?' 'Is she not getting worse?' and soon, as they can be answered that she is quite well, indeed stronger than ever, they will be obliged to admit that you have been gratuitously slandered."

"But, supposing Veronica fell ill!" exclaimed Claude, terrified by an idea which crossed his mind—the heart complaint which Carbonneau had prophesied for the future.

"Certainly, that would be most unfortunate, from every point of view, and for both of you; but to destroy the effect that the announcement of the will would produce, she must not merely fall ill but die. What is the use of making a person who has left you her fortune ill? She must be killed—for you to reap any advantage. Now, if your wife fell ill, not merely would you attend on her, but you would cure her, and this cure would be another proof in your favour. You have not noticed anything in her condition calculated to alarm you since your visit to Carbonneau?"

"No—not at all; in fact she is much better—a couple of days ago I even suspended the digitalis treatment, which she was undergoing. However, after the shock she has sustained, I propose to renew it again to-day; still I trust it will only be for a short time."

"Very well then, everything is for the best. And even supposing we carried the question to extremes, it would seem as if the announcement of this will in your favour were positively bound to assure your wife's health."

"How?"

"Note that I am not now speaking seriously; still if your suppositions relative to the poisoning had been realised, it would have been necessary to discover who was the poisoner. Well, now that you are your wife's universal legatee poison is quite out of the question. For when I say that there is only one person who has any interest in poisoning Madame Claude, and that person is you, it is equivalent to saying that such a person does not exist. Love of life and honour outweighs love of money. However great may be our desire to acquire a fortune, we do not kill the person who may leave it to us

when one knows beforehand, that one's crime will be detected. However, all this is evidently absurd. If I mention it, it is merely so that you may not lose your head the first time your wife feels unwell. One worry is quite enough at a time. Tell Madame Claude, that we will call this evening, Denise and I, to compliment her on her idea."

"Good-bye, and thanks." *

"You must thank your wife, not me. If it hadn't been for her inspiration, I don't quite see how we should have defended ourselves. I say 'ourselves,' for we share your trouble, my wife and I; however, as you may guess, we shan't try and close the mouths of those who speak to us in future concerning Madame Claude's health, until we have heard all that they have to say. I shall really be delighted to inflict a crushing rejoinder on certain persons we both know."

Claude's mind was comparatively at ease when he took leave of his friend. This indirect answer to the slander of which he was the object was perhaps scarcely the reply his indignation would have prompted him to give, but after all it would possibly prove the most decisive rejoinder. If Veronica did fall ill, he could not imagine that she would be at all seriously indisposed, for he did not conceive, despite Carbonneau's remarks, that her life was in any degree immediately menaced.

XVI.

"If you only knew how happy I am," exclaimed Veronica, when her husband apprized her of his conversation with Louis Mèrault. "So I have done something really useful. The wonderful part of it is that I did so instinctively without thinking. Men of experience and capacity are often at a loss to extricate themselves from a difficult situation; and it suffices for a poor little woman with no experience and very little brains perhaps—at all events, quite an inferior creature by the side of these clever men—it suffices for such a woman to be inspired by her love to find in her heart what they have been powerless to find in their brains. Will you allow me to feel proud of myself? Not very proud but just a little, just enough to make me happy."

It was her feeling of happiness that led her to reject the idea of an interview with Cousin Quite-Well? such as Mèrault had

suggested. "No," said she, "we will find another means of letting her know that the will she begged me not to make is made. But I can't consent to see her and speak with her again. I have suffered too deeply. This is the first time that any one has ever been cruel to me. I don't want to revenge myself. In fact, I am glad to find that my heart harbours no idea of revenge. One must be tried to learn one's own worth. Let me dress the wounds that have been inflicted on me with a little vanity. Do you know, I would even support fresh blows if they would only awaken some quality in my heart or mind that might lead you to love me all the more."

"You are the best of wives."

"I can understand at present that love elevates one's feelings, and endows one with a better nature. I am sure that those who are wicked are those who have never been loved. Take Cousin Quite-Well? for instance, who ever loved her? I don't think any one ever did."

"Perhaps because she herself never loved any one—not even her brother."

"However, I think it would be better for you to see her."

"Many thanks. Do you fancy that I take a pleasure in revenge? Don't you know that goodness is contagious, and that life with a dear little wife like you, elevates one's own nature?"

Veronica cast down her eyelids and a vivid blush mantled over her cheeks and forehead. "You shouldn't have answered me with those kind words," said she, "I did not deserve them. Forgive me. We will neither of us see Mademoiselle Quite-Well? but to-morrow I will call on her friend Mademoiselle Aveine, and you may be quite sure that she will consent to replace us. She will act the little scene which M. Mèrault advised me to perform, and the effect we wish for, will be obtained. To-morrow evening all the town will know that my will is made. What a pity the 'Diable Boiteux,' is not here. I would have asked him to carry me into certain houses to hear the folks pity me. What fun it would be! However, I shall still have some amusement in talking about my health. Sometimes I will play the part of the 'Malade Imaginaire,' and at others I shall be as lively as possible. Oh, we'll have some sport yet!" Laughing at this idea, Veronica kissed her husband with child-like gaiety, which naturally brought a smile to Claude's eyes and lips. Veronica's plan, he thought, would certainly be productive of considerable amusement.

As he was about to leave the house, she called to him to wait

a minute. "I want your advice," she said, "or rather your authorisation."

"In reference to what?" enquired Claude.

"If I do not desire to speak about the will to Mademoiselle Quite-Well?" she said, "there is some one whom I think I ought to apprise of it, before any one else, and that's Nathalie."

Whenever Veronica spoke to Claude concerning Madame Gillet, he invariably gave her the same answer—an answer which rendered any further advice on his part unnecessary. "Just as you like," he always said, and it was precisely these words that he uttered on the present occasion.

"If any one has a right to occupy themselves about my will," resumed Veronica, "that person is Nathalie who would be my heir if I happened to die intestate. With Nathalie's nature and ideas, I'm certain she doesn't think of the matter, still that's precisely a reason for my thinking of it. Directly she comes back from Condé, this will of mine will be the first thing that people will talk to her about. I think it best, therefore, for me to be beforehand in the matter. Might she not fancy it strange for me to have acquainted every one excepting her with the making of this will? What do you think? You don't say anything."

"I'm listening to you."

"Don't go and imagine that she might get angry at the thought of my disinheriting her in your favour. You know her sufficiently well to believe that. She hasn't any such low ideas. Besides, as you may understand, she can never have counted on this inheritance. I am eight years younger than she is, and if we had a child her rights would no longer exist."

"Do just as you like."

"When shall you be back?"

"In about a couple of hours."

"Well, in the meanwhile I will write to Nathalie. The time won't seem so long to me then. Do you know that since I loved you I have lost all idea of the duration of time. When you are with me it passes so swiftly, and when you are away it seems so dreadfully long!"

"Then I must try and be back as soon as possible. Adieu!" exclaimed Claude as he kissed his wife and hurried out of the room, being already late for an important appointment.

When he had left the house, Veronica proceeded to write the following letter to her cousin.

“Condé, 22nd April, 1877.

“My dear Nathalie,—You are probably asking yourself why I have not yet answered your kind and affectionate letter. I have hitherto been prevented from doing so, and this is how—

“The day before yesterday I received a visit from our cousin Quite-Well ? who, as you will recollect, had not been to see me for a long while past, for she dislikes Claude, and is displeased with me because I prefer to obey my husband rather than to obey her. This visit of hers had an object, the most abominable, most criminal object it is possible to imagine:—it was to warn me that my husband was poisoning me, and that he was only waiting for me to make my will to finish me off.

“What should you have thought of such a speech delivered in a cold stern voice, with one arm raised from time to time as if to call upon heaven to witness her words ? For my part, I was at first stupefied, then thunderstruck, and finally exasperated ; and then I told Mademoiselle Lerissel, who seemed very surprised, to leave the house.

“I had a dreadful attack when I was left alone. I did not imagine that it was possible to suffer so acutely. Fortunately Claude came home. I tried to be courageous, so as not to frighten him, but I fainted, and then I had to tell him everything. What a dreadful blow it was for him ! The idea of his being suspected and accused !

“It was necessary to reply to this charge, and we could not do so by giving every one the lie, so I had a very simple idea, you would have had it in my place, but it appears it was a master-stroke—at least, this is what the Méraults say. I at once made a will in my husband’s favour. That’s my answer to these calumnies.—‘You pretend that directly my will is made, my husband will poison me : well, its made, and I’m still alive, indeed, I hope to live for some time to come.’ M. Mérault wanted me to take this answer to our cousin in person ; but, as I don’t wish to see her again, I entrusted Mademoiselle Aveine with the duty : by this means all Condé will know the story to-morrow.

“So, this is how I have disinherited you, my dear Nathalie ; a little god-son or god-daughter might have done the same any day. I hope you will not feel offended, by my depriving you of all right to a fortune which I know you never counted upon.

“I am sure that it is not necessary for me to tell you how we have suffered by this terrible accusation, which must have been invented by some very low-minded individuals. But by

suffering together as we have done, we have learnt to know, better than we knew before, how deeply we love one another; suffering binds loving hearts more closely together, and each relies for support and consolation on the other. I had hitherto only known happiness with Etienne, now we have experienced misfortune together, and however terrible the shock may have been I really don't know whether I ought to complain of it. I have found in Etienne's heart treasures of tenderness which I had divined, but which I had not yet seen him so openly display; and, on the other hand, I believe that I am dearer to him than I ever was before. It was necessary to purchase this result, but I do not regret the price I have paid for it. Don't scold me on this subject. I believe that my lot on earth is to love, that the object of my life is love, so it is only natural if I devote everything that happens to me, either good or evil, to the development of my affection.

"Such is my present state—morally of course, for such shocks as the one I have sustained are bound to have a bad physical effect. I was getting on so well that Etienne had told me to leave off taking the pills, but I have now to begin taking them afresh, and morning and evening I swallow my dose of digitalis. I hope that by the time you return I shall be all right again. It's impossible to be ill, when one's happy.

"Apropos of this subject, tell me in your next letter when you will be back. You have now been away a fortnight. You never stopped at Verneuil so long before. I really miss you. It must be understood, that, if you return by the five o'clock diligence you will come and dine with us the same evening. Try and let me know beforehand, that I may prepare a welcome home for you. We are expecting you impatiently. If you delay returning too long, Cousin Quite-Well? will have had time to calm down—and her indignation will have gradually worn away. You ought to come back, merely to witness one of her melodramatic exhibitions. I embrace you affectionately,

"VERONICA CLAUDE."

This letter did not at first find Nathalie at Verneuil.

Her sojourn in that locality had been one long fever. She was perpetually alone with her old aunt, who talked of nothing else but death; and the only excitement in her monotonous existence, in which the same thought unceasingly besieged her mind, was the arrival of the postman, who called merely once a day. If this excitement was short, however, it was at the same

time intense ; reaching its maximum, whenever the letter-carrier happened to hand her a missive, but gradually passing away, whenever she recognised that the envelope was directed by Veronica ; a proof that the latter was still alive.

This interval preceding the *dénouement* she had prepared grew more and more terrible as it became prolonged, and, accordingly, so as to get rid of her anxiety, as far as possible, she resolved to go elsewhere, and try and find some means of occupying her time. She therefore started off on a visit to another relative living at Evreux, at the same time asking her aunt to have any letters that arrived for her at Verneuil, forwarded to her new address.

This request was complied with, and Veronica's letter relating to the will was at once sent on to Evreux ; but when it reached there, Nathalie had just betaken herself back to Verneuil, and here it was that she ultimately received and read the missive which has been transcribed above.

XVII.

SUSTAINED by the sentiments to which she had given expression in this letter to Nathalie, Veronica soon recovered from the shock which Cousin Quite-Well's revelation had occasioned. What did it matter if this shock had caused her pain, since, instead of loosening the ties which bound her to her husband, it had on the contrary tightened them ?

Four days had elapsed since the old maid's memorable visit, when in the evening, shortly before dinner-time, Veronica suddenly felt ill at ease.

At first she did not pay much attention to the sensation of suffering which grew upon her, for the delightful day which had just elapsed, had filled her heart with joy. She had been out walking with her husband, and after visiting a patient who lived about a league from the town, they had strolled home through the woods of La Rouvrage. The season was spring, the air was mild and balmy, and the sun shone radiantly in an azure sky, flecked with tiny clouds. A subtle perfume seemed to emanate from every tree and shrub, and the birds filled the forest with their joyous notes and amorous warblings. Never had Veronica had so charming a walk, and, indeed, they would have loitered in the woods until the evening, had Claude not

been obliged to return to Condé, where a couple of patients awaited his visit before dinner-time. Accordingly they walked slowly home, engaged in affectionate converse, halting to look at each other, and pressing each other's hands from time to time—happy in the words that they exchanged, in everything their eyes beheld, satisfied with all creation, and particularly with themselves. At the outskirts of the town they separated, Claude having to call upon his patients, while Veronica went home and took her pill before dinner.

When she had done so, she felt that after passing the whole day in the open air, she could not possibly await her husband's return shut up in her room, however pleasant the latter might ordinarily seem; and accordingly she went and sat down on a bench in the garden. This garden was a small one, merely comprising a lawn flanked by evergreens and encompassed with ivy-covered walls; despite its minute proportions, it was however still a garden, and having been laid out on the site of the old ramparts it had the advantage of offering a bird's eye view of the town, a long range of the neighbouring slopes and woods being also seen beyond the house-tops.

The bench on which Veronica was seated, stood at the highest point of this agreeable little pleasure ground and she took a strange delight in following the rays of the setting sun as they settled on roofs and window panes around, darting for a moment moreover on an old crumbling half-demolished tower standing at the end of the garden and covered with mosses, lichen, and other parasitic vegetation. This calm, mild evening was an agreeable compliment to the day which had just elapsed, and as this idea caught Veronica's fancy, she retraced in her mind's eye the phases of her walk with Claude. How happy she felt she was, despite the hostility and wickedness of those who surrounded her. How tenderly loved too; how good and affectionate her husband proved himself to be. What thought and solicitude did he not show for all her tastes and wants? Where, among all the men she knew was there such another—one who might be compared with him either as regards intelligence or good nature? Truly she must be indulgent to those who had launched forth that shameful accusation. Envy could have alone inspired it—envy of his sterling worth, his professional skill, his moral attainments. And so this accusation was an involuntary tribute paid to his perfection.

It was at this moment of her reverie, that Veronica suddenly felt ill at ease. The sensation she experienced was doubtless

caused by the fatigue of her long walk ; was it not perhaps the intoxicating effect of the balmy flower-scented air which she had been breathing ? With this thought she returned to her meditation. Ah ! when she had a child, what woman would there be in the whole world happier than she ? How delightful life seemed, and how pleasant it was to look into the future which appeared so full of promise !

Meanwhile her feeling of oppression was increasing. Still she would not leave her seat ; her day dream was more agreeable, in this garden, face to face with the horizon which the setting sun had covered with golden streaks ; and besides it seemed as if she could breathe more freely in the open air. No doubt she had heated herself during her walk. But, instead of her breathing becoming easier, it became on the contrary more difficult. Suddenly she was seized with nausea ; her mouth seemed to fill with water, and she experienced a feeling of giddiness. Was she threatened with another attack like those she had already experienced ? At this thought she shuddered from head to foot.

But on the nausea leaving her she felt re-assured and reproached herself with having entertained such an idea. Who is there who does not feel unwell at times ? No doubt this was the effect of the spring, the result of fatigue. Most likely the latter, for a feeling of drowsiness was asserting itself. She leant her elbow on the back of the bench and resting her head on her hand, closed her sleepy eyes.

A minute later she was seized with a spasm, and almost directly afterwards became sick. She must not deny this evidence. She was plainly experiencing another attack, which was following the same course as the two preceding ones : a feeling of oppression, nausea, drowsiness, spasms and sickness. After all, however, what did it matter ? She had got over the two others and she would get over this one as well. It merely meant a few hours' suffering ; that was all. She had better go into the house again, and go to bed.

As she was about to open the door, however, she suddenly paused. She had heard the voice of her maid in the hall and she would have preferred not to have been seen ; she did not want the servants to know that she felt ill. Perhaps they were aware of the rumours that were circulating in the town, and accordingly she did not desire to meet their inquisitive gaze, or to have to answer their importunate questions. What might they not suppose ? And then they would probably go about

repeating what they had seen and heard, for she could not bid them be silent. Under what possible pretext could she do so? However, she must not remain standing there, for she felt that a sensation of great weakness was gaining upon her.

She entered the hall and walked across it towards the staircase as fast as her unsteady limbs would allow her to. When she had caught hold of the bannister, she turned round. "I don't feel very well," she said to the maid who was close by, "when M. Claude comes home, you had better tell him."

"Shall I go upstairs with madame?" eagerly asked the maid.

"No thanks; it is nothing at all. I don't require any assistance." Saying which she went to her room. Scarcely had she entered it than she was seized with a fresh attack of sickness, more violent and painful than the first. During the short respite which followed, she was able to undress after a fashion, but, on the other hand, she was quite unable to gather up her garments. She had just sufficient strength left to get into bed. She had only been lying down for a few minutes when the sound of hasty footsteps was heard upon the stairs. The door was thrown open and Claude rushed into the room.

He sprang to the bedside, but before he had reached it, she was desirous of re-assuring him. "It's nothing," she exclaimed. But her trembling intonation, the pallor of her features, the quivering of her lips, the disordered aspect of the room, plainly belied her words. Still she endeavoured to smile, and as he bent over the bed to look at her, she exclaimed, "you know I am not at all frightened."

A fresh attack of sickness interrupted her words, and it was so painful a one that it left her quite exhausted. Claude then proceeded to examine her attentively and he was able to remark, as he had already done on the occasion of the second attack, that her heart was beating most irregularly, now throbbing fast and loudly, now going faint and slow; again the pulsations of the radial artery were intermittent and irregular. No mistake could be made. Veronica was undergoing a third crisis, similar to the two previous ones, so far as he had been able to observe them, but the present attack seemingly announced itself as more violent.

"You've taken nothing?" asked Claude.

"Only my pill, with a drop of water to enable me to swallow it."

"You are sure you only took a single one?"

Veronica nodded affirmatively, for it was painful for her to speak ; she could hear and see well enough ; she retained full possession of her mind as if she were in perfect health, but any effort to speak seemed to distress her.

If she had been sincere when she said that she was not at all frightened, Claude, on the other hand, was positively terrified. He was frightened for her and for himself ; and his previous remark to M  rault instinctively recurred to him : " But supposing she was taken ill ? " That hypothesis was now realised : Veronica *was* ill, and her will, moreover, was made. This was not, however, the moment for him to lose his head, or for him to think exclusively of himself. He must give his full attention to Veronica, and to her alone : he must attend on her and save her. Never had he been so painfully situated ; he must act with all possible calm and resolution. When the first moment of terror had passed away, he acted to the best of his ability in attempting to procure her some little relief. He succeeded pretty well in this endeavour, and then allowed his mind to dwell once more on the idea which had at first seized hold of him. There was no need of reflection for him to understand how terrible, how tragical the situation was. Was there anything that could be done to arrest the course of this attack ?

As a doctor alone, the task Claude had before him was a weighty one. He must give his mind up to his professional duties exclusively. Still, his position as a man, as a husband, was so distressing, and the thoughts that besieged him were so appalling, that he felt he needed an ally to assist him in carrying the burden that weighed him down. Accordingly, he at once sent for Louis M  rault, without, however, letting Veronica know that he had done so, for such an intimation might, not unnaturally, frighten her. The advocate and his wife immediately hastened to the house, and the maid came to tell Claude that they were downstairs.

" M  rault and Denise have called in passing," said Claude to Veronica ; " would you like to see Denise ? "

Veronica nodded affirmatively.

Then as Denise entered the room. Claude walked into an adjoining apartment in order to speak with M  rault. The latter shook him warmly by the hand. " You at least believe in me, my friend," said Claude ; " but who else does ? Fear must not distract me, however, nor paralyze my efforts. For the moment I must only be a doctor, nothing more. If I have sent for you it is to ask you to watch over my honour."

"I willingly accept the mission."

"Then be master here and let me remain with her."

As Claude was about to re-enter the bedroom, M  rault stopped him. "I would suggest that you should send for Graux and Marsin," he said.

"Give the order yourself in my name, and send for old Caradon as well." At this moment the maid came to say that madame would like to see M. M  rault.

As the advocate approached her bedside, Veronica held out her hand with some difficulty, and exclaimed, "You will defend Etienne. I did wrong in speaking so soon about the will. It's my fault—"

She was soon interrupted by the arrival of Dr. Graux. "Eh, dear me! what's all this!" he said, walking towards the bed; "ill again? Why, what are you thinking of, my dear madame?" It was Graux's habit to make his patients responsible for their complaints, and to scold them in consequence. This habit was, however, of a purely superficial nature, for in reality he was always disposed to attend on those who sent for him to the best of his ability, like a good-hearted fellow as he was.

Veronica had grown rapidly worse. She had several times been sick, and was constantly reaching without being able to vomit. She had fainted twice; the colour had left her lips and tongue; the beating of her pulse was very weak and irregular; she only breathed by a contraction of the diaphragm; her eyes remained closed, and it was with great difficulty that she managed to open them every now and then.

While Graux was examining her, Marsin arrived, and a little later on old Caradon put in an appearance. When the latter's colleagues saw him enter the room, they exchanged a glance of surprise, which did not escape Claude. Their looks plainly signified: "Has he lost his head to send in such a grave emergency for this old fellow, who only knows how to blame? What assistance can he give?"

The examination began afresh, to the great worry of Veronica, who fretted and complained when Claude, who was the only one who touched her, executed, or ascertained by examination, whatever his colleagues suggested. In the midst of her complaints she opened her eyes, and, glancing at him tenderly, murmured that it was her head that hurt her, and that she was stifling. When they had all finished looking and questioning, Marsin called Claude aside. Before they withdrew, however, Caradon leant over the bed. "It will be nothing," he said.

Graux approached the bedside in his turn. "We will rid you of these pains," he observed. Marsin alone said nothing.

Leaving Denise to look after Veronica, they all went into the room on the other side of the landing, which Nathalie had occupied in former times. Then Claude proceeded to explain everything that he knew: their walk through the woods of La Rouvraye, during which his wife had seemed as well as possible, and the circumstances of her return home; he added that Veronica had then taken a pill of digitalis, washed down with a glass of water, and sometime afterwards this attack had occurred, beginning with symptoms of oppression, nausea, vomiting, and drowsiness.

"So she is taking digitalis?" remarked Graux.

"No doubt," replied Claude.

"And why?"

"Carbonneau, whom I consulted, feared a contraction of the aorta; for my own part, I feared an ulcerous formation at the heart."

"In my opinion," responded Graux, "this is a case of angina, combined with goutty tendencies, which should not have been treated with digitalis, which indeed has worn out the muscles of the heart."

Claude turned toward Marsin. "For my part," said the latter, after a moment's hesitation, "I believe that this is a case of poisoning."

"Pooh!" ejaculated Caradon.

Claude did not say anything, but he staggered backwards. Marsin continued to speak, addressing himself to Caradon—"I mean a case of unintentional poisoning by digitalis."

"But the dose was only two millegrammes a day."

"Are you sure? Perhaps Madame Claude may have exceeded that dose. Were the pills properly prepared? To my mind it is evident that all the symptoms point to poisoning by digitalis."

"But she had not taken any digitalis at the epoch of the last attack," said Claude, "and yet the symptoms were the same as now."

A scientific discussion ensued, in which old Caradon did not take part. Suddenly he interrupted the speakers. "Well, after all that," he said, "what have you done? what is there to be done?"

"I have applied poultices," replied Claude, "in hopes of provoking a revulsion."

"Good," said Caradon, "but that's not enough. Apply a large blister to the chest, and in the meantime these gentlemen will be able to discuss. Now go and occupy yourself with that."

"Try alcoholic beverages," said Marsin, "champagne. And let the gastric pump function."

As Claude left the room to accomplish these suggestions, Caradon followed him, and on the landing grasped both his hands. "Don't worry yourself," he said "I haven't changed my opinion concerning you. You are a brave fellow." He pressed Claude's hands affectionately.

"I'll go back," resumed Caradon, "and bring Graux and Marsin to reason. Stupid fools! They annoy me with their big words. For my part, I believe in an ulcerated chest and stomach. However, we will discuss the matter. It would be impossible to do so in your presence. I pity you too deeply. Go and stop with her, my friend, don't leave her again."

Although Veronica was lying with her head thrown back upon the pillow, her eyes closed as if she were insensible, breathing in a gasping fashion, and with a noise similar to that which a piston makes, while every now and then moreover she gave utterance to a complaining groan, she was still sufficiently conscious of what was going on around her to recognise her husband's footfall. She turned her face towards him, and raising her head, which a second later fell heavily again upon the counterpane, she signalled him to approach. He thought that she wanted him to kiss her, and leaning over the bed he pressed his lips against her forehead. As he did so she caught hold of him, and by a glance intimated that she wished him to stop with her.

After having acted as Marsin advised, he sat down in front of her. How pale her face had become, and how her features were distorted by convulsive pangs. She seemed however to grow a trifle better, as if her husband's hands which clasped her own, had the power of warming or electrifying her. "You mustn't leave me," she said in a faint voice.

"If I did so, it was only to consult with my colleagues," he replied, "we were occupied about you."

"I know that, but your colleagues can't do anything for me." She made an effort, and in a slow voice exclaimed: "you alone can save me"—then after a pause, being constantly hindered in her speech by the difficulty of breathing, she resumed—"and you *will* save me—it is nothing to suffer—let me suffer as much as you like—but save me—you are my preserver—save me, dear

Etienne—I love you so—I want to live to make you happy.” She was obliged to pause, for she was half stifled; then she endeavoured to inhale a supply of breath that would enable her to speak again.

“Don’t tire yourself,” said Claude. “I beg you to be calm. You know that I am going to save you.”

“You *must*,” she said, pursuing her idea, and thus showing that she retained all her intelligence, “not merely for me—but for your own sake—it would be too horrible if—Denise, Monsieur Méréault——”

These efforts had again exhausted her, she fell into a fainting fit; her pulse ceased to beat, but after a pause of several instants, it again became faintly perceptible. She then opened her eyes once more. “Save me!” she murmured in a supplicating, complaining voice. Denise, who could not restrain her tears, went to the other end of the room, so that Veronica might not see her weep.

The three doctors re-entered the apartment; they found the sufferer in a very critical condition; Caradon asked however that the blister which had just been brought might be applied. When this had been done, Caradon announced that he and Graux were about to withdraw, but that Marsin would remain so as to be at Claude’s disposal. “We have arranged that together,” added the old fellow in a significant tone.

So saying he left the room followed by Graux and Méréault who escorted the two doctors to the street door. As for Claude, he did not leave his chair. He sat there holding his wife’s hands, crushed, and broken-hearted. If his colleagues had not asked to speak with him, it was because they had nothing to say, nothing to suggest. That was only too evident; again Marsin’s remaining needed no formal explanation. But if they abandoned the patient, was he to do so? Was he to let her suffer, to let her die? The sentiment of his own impotence weighed upon him. Ah! after all how limited, how contemptible, is the doctor’s skill.

Méréault re-entered the room, but, instead of approaching the bed, he made a sign to his wife who went towards him. He spoke to her for a moment in a low tone, and then they placed the large table, that stood between the two windows, near the door over the spot where Veronica had vomited on entering the room. When that was done, Méréault again spoke to his wife in a low tone, and she went into the dressing-room where she remained for some time.

Claude's mind was not sufficiently free for him to pay any attention to these incidents, however strange they might be. He was gazing at his wife, following all the phases of her attack, now feeling her pulse, now listening to her heart, now making her drink. He applied fresh poultices on fancying that he detected a slight improvement, still clinging to hope and saying to himself that she had been quite as bad as this during the last attack, and yet she had got well again. In the belief that she had been as bad before, he was however deceived. Affection blinded him to the truth. If emotion, grief, and anguish had only allowed him to reason, if she whom he was attending on had not been his wife, he would have recognised certain signs which would have shown him that his surmise was an erroneous one.

Veronica no longer opened her eyes; and when he spoke to her, she did not seem to hear him. Her arms were now so weak, that, whenever he raised them they seemed as if they were completely paralysed. Neither the blister nor the most energetic revulsives that he employed, neither the gastric pump nor the alcoholic beverages produced any effect. The hours passed by; but instead of her condition improving, it had grown worse. No more words, no more looks. Rapid, trembling pulsations of the heart, and now and again a faint groan.

Marsin, who at first had remained at the other end of the room, only coming to look at the patient now and then, here approached the bedside where Mérault and Denise were standing. He made some remark to Claude who was going to and fro, now on one side of the bed and now on the other, still seeking for a remedy, still fighting for his darling's life, replacing one thing that had failed by another, which he hoped would prove more successful, and at times embracing the sufferer with the frenzy of despair.

At long intervals a muscular contraction might be noted on Veronica's face and in her hands. But that was all. Her breathing was so irregular, that at times it became quite suspended, starting afresh after a short interval, and growing so loud, that it might have been mistaken for a murmur of complaint. Claude suffered extreme anguish during these intervals when her breathing was suspended, and these intervals, alas, grew longer and longer.

There came one longer yet than all the others. He bent over her, and pressing his lips to hers, he endeavoured to infuse his own life into her. Then, still leaning forward, his eyes fixed on

her chest, motionless, not daring to breathe himself, he waited for more than ten minutes—an eternity ! But she remained quite motionless. Had she breathed again, the noise of her respiration, however faint, would assuredly have been heard in that room where all was hushed.

The sobs of Denise and Mèrault made Claude understand the terrible truth. His wife, his dear Veronica, was dead.

XVIII.

THE silvery moonlight was streaming through the windows, the shutters of which no one had thought of closing. Marsin left the room. Denise and Mèrault, however, would not abandon Claude, who had sunk into an arm-chair placed near the bed.

After this terrible struggle against Death, disputing every inch of ground, perforce retreating, but always looking the foe in the face, and striving to arrest his inward progress, after all this anguish and emotion, after these sudden alternatives of hope and despair, Claude felt overwhelmed—now that further resistance was unavailing. Grief had crushed him, and he sat there, his arms hanging beside him, his body bent, his head drooping forward, as if he were either paralysed or idiotic. He remained thus for some time, for Denise and Mèrault, who had retired to the further end of the room, were too pre-occupied with their own grief to think of disturbing him, even if they had dared to do so. Suddenly he was roused from his torpor by a violent shudder ; an exclamation, a sob, escaped him, he rose up, and throwing himself upon the bed, he clasped his wife with both arms.

Mèrault and Denise ventured to approach, and stood behind him, but they did not speak. When Claude stood up again he perceived them and held out both his hands. “ You loved her,” he said, “ and she loved you.” But his emotion seemed too great to allow him to continue, and it was only after a fresh interval, that looking round the room, he exclaimed. “ And Marsin ? ”

“ He has gone ” Mèrault replied.

“ Naturally. But you my friends, you have not gone. Thank you.”

“ It was very natural for us to stop.”

“ For you, but for me—” And he shuddered again from

head to foot. Then, after another pause during which he seemed overwhelmed with despair, he looked at Denise, and said :—"I have a service to ask of you, but you need not fulfil it unless you feel strong enough to do so."

"I shall be strong enough," she replied, in a grave and resolute voice.

"I wish you to assist me in dressing her. I want no one to see her, no one to touch her save you and me."

"I will assist you."

Then turning towards Mèrault Claude said. "I want you, my friend, to undertake all the needful formalities. I don't wish to leave her, I don't want any one to disturb me. Whatever you may do will be well done." By a mere gesture of the head he asked Denise if she were ready and she answered him affirmatively in the same manner.

Mèrault walked towards the door, with the view of leaving them together, but before retiring he called his wife and whispered a few words in her ear. She returned to the spot where Claude was standing. "Did you hang up her dress in the dressing-room?" asked the latter.

"Yes," replied Denise.

They then went together into the dressing-room. Claude was about to feel in the pocket of the dress, but it seemed as if the garment still robed Veronica's living form, and so turning towards Denise he asked her to give him the keys that were there.

With one of these keys Claude opened a cupboard. "I beg you to take from here all that is necessary," he said to Denise. "I cannot." So speaking, he returned into the bedroom.

In a few minutes Denise rejoined him, and then together they proceeded to arrange the bed and dress the corpse which they laid out on the bed, resting the head upon two pillows.

As the lamp-light shone upon the face of Veronica, she seemed still alive, for this sudden death had not inflicted the same ravages as a long illness, and looking at her lying thus, her hair carefully combed, her linen of spotless white, her eyes closed, her mouth slightly parted, one might have imagined that she was sleeping that soft peaceful sleep of youth, which no suffering nor evil thought disturbs. There she lay in all the splendour of her beauty—the beauty of twenty summers—rendered the more noble by the august majesty of death.

Claude stepped a few paces backward, and overwhelmed with

despair, gazed upon her. "Is it possible!" he ejaculated with furious violence. Then turning his rage against himself, he exclaimed. "And I did nothing, could do nothing, saw nothing!"

He took several hasty strides up and down the room. He no longer spoke. From time to time he pressed his head with his hands, or struck his breast, then returning towards the bed he stopped short beside it. At this moment M rault re-entered the room. His return changed the course of Claude's thoughts. He could now revert to the idea which had occurred to him originally. Alas he could do nothing more for his patient; he could no longer attend on her, his r le as a physician was at an end. "And what will the world say?" he asked M rault.

Brief as his question was, it was still sufficiently clear and precise; and yet M rault did not answer it immediately; he hesitated and turned his eyes away as he met Claude's gaze. "You don't answer me," said the latter.

"What can I answer you. Does not the world teem with foolish and wicked people? Fortunately, every one is not wicked, every one is not a fool, there are honest folks besides, and they will defend you if you are attacked. These words were uttered without conviction. It was not thus that M rault usually spoke. It seemed as if he had no great confidence in the defence of the honest folks he had mentioned. "Graux believes in an angina," he remarked, "Marsin in an accident caused by the digitalis. What do you think?"

"I? Nothing at all. Anything. To say the truth, I really don't know. This sudden death may be the result of an ulcerous formation at the heart combined with an obstruction of the arteries. Such as is occasioned by clotted fibrine which after forming in one artery is swiftly drawn into the blood current and soon obliterates a smaller artery, just as a piston would act. Still this explanation does not satisfy me. It is true that I have lost my head."

Then, leaving M rault, Claude went and kissed Veronica on the forehead. Sitting down beside the bed he remained there without moving and without speaking. The growing hum of the town roused him from his prostration. Then he thought of his friends. Denise must be desirous of seeing her children, and M rault would doubtless have to occupy himself with his own affairs. He suggested therefore, that they should leave him.

Denise took her departure, but M rault declined to go, and Claude was struck with the manner in which he insisted on stopping. "I have to write some letters," said the advocate,

"I will install myself in your consulting room. You can remain here without being disturbed. I shall be downstairs. If you need me you will only have to call. I shan't go out till later in the day."

Although it was thus arranged that Mérault should only return to the bedroom if Claude called for him, yet shortly before eight o'clock he re-entered that apartment, and Claude was able to perceive that he was labouring under some painful emotion. "My dear friend," said the advocate, "I must ask you to come down-stairs with me."

"What is the matter?" A sinister presentiment invaded Claude's mind.

"You are a man of heart," said Mérault, "capable of supporting adversity and injustice."

Claude gave vent to a hoarse cry of horror and indignation. "They have come to arrest me!" he exclaimed.

"No—only you are asked to give certain explanations. The public prosecutor and the investigating magistrate are in your consulting room waiting for you."

"Let us go down-stairs," said Claude.

But now before doing so, Mérault grasped his hand and exclaimed. "Be calm! Don't forget that it is your honour which is at stake! Weigh your answers my friend. He who speaks the language of truth is strong."

"How can I weigh my answers at such a moment?" said Claude. "Do I even know what I say, what I think? Let us go down."

They found four persons waiting in the consulting room. M. Bassaget, the public prosecutor; M. Legrain, the investigating magistrate; a clerk, and a fourth individual with whom Claude was unacquainted.

M. Bassaget was standing with his back to the mantel-piece. As Claude and Mérault entered he waved his hand, but this gesture was not a salutation, but rather a precursory oratorical movement. "Doctor Claude," said he in a majestic and less rapid tone than usual, "rumours are being circulated concerning you which, until we are more amply informed, we desire to believe calumnious. But the public clamour which accuses you is so loud and persistent that it obliges us to fulfil a painful mission—that of ascertaining what truth there is in the rumours in question, which are now based on an unfortunately only too certain fact. In the interest of justice, as in the interest of your own honour, you must assist us in our task."

"Gentleman," replied Claude, "I am at your disposal. What do you require of me?"

It was the investigating magistrate who answered him. "I will tell you," said he.

XIX.

WHEN the public prosecutor had finished his little speech, he turned towards Mérault and his attitude did not need any accompaniment of words to be understood. It plainly signified, "Please to leave us alone." And moreover it was rather an order than a request.

Under the circumstances in which this order was given, Mérault need not have obeyed, but he did not consider that it would be either prudent or polite to offer any resistance, and so he walked towards the door.

"I will just mention," he said, looking at the two magistrates, "that I have not left the house since yesterday evening. While my *friend*—he emphasised this word—was occupied with his wife, I had to take various important steps, and to give various orders. If you need any information from me, you have only to call me." So saying he shook Claude by the hand and left the room.

The investigating magistrate made a sign to his clerk and the latter seated himself in Claude's arm-chair in front of his writing table. The two magistrates then sat down in turn, while the fourth personage, who seemed ill at ease in his buttoned-up frock-coat of a military cut, remained standing in front of one of the windows.

"Doctor Claude," said the investigating magistrate, "will you tell me your name—christian names—your age, and the place where you were born?"

"Etienne Claude, born at Hamnebault, January 17, 1846."

"You are consequently 31 years old?"

"Thirty-one and four months."

"A year ago you married Mademoiselle Veronica Lerissel; was this union a marriage of interest, or a marriage of love?"

"A marriage of love!"

"And of interest also it would seem."

"It is true that my wife had a fortune."

"What was its amount?"

"About 400,000 francs."

"And yours?"

"I only possessed what my profession brought me in."

"How much has that been?"

"I began by making about 6,000 francs a year. Recently, I have made 22,000."

"You lived on good terms with your wife?"

"Yes."

"You loved her?"

"I adored her." Emotion caused Claude's voice to tremble.

"And she?"

"She loved me."

"What was the state of her health?"

"Good. However, she had certain indispositions—the two first evidently occasioned by rheumatic pains, and then two attacks, which, in my eyes, were inexplicable."

"What were the characteristic symptoms of these later attacks?"

"I was only present at the second one; the first occurred while I was out of the house."

"Please to tell us about the one you were present at."

"The characteristic symptoms were great trouble in the circulation of the blood, oppression, nausea, vomiting, weakness, and drowsiness."

"If these attacks were inexplicable to you, did they not excite your apprehensions?"

"I beg your pardon, they did—and I asked myself if my wife had not been poisoned."

"By whom?"

"I did not enter into that question. I caused the vomited matter to be analysed, which was the first step to take."

"Who analysed it?"

"M. Vaudan, assistant toxicologist at the School of Chemistry in Paris. I myself made various physiological experiments on animals, with a portion of the matter which I had kept back. Neither the analysis nor the experiments revealed anything suspicious from a toxicological point of view."

"Did that fully re-assure you?"

"No. I desired to consult an old master in whom I had full confidence—Professor Carbonneau. I took my wife to Paris. Carbonneau examined her. He detected slight wounds on the side of the heart which led him to fear a contraction of the aorta. Directly we returned home, I caused my wife to take pills composed of digitalis."

"Did Dr. Carbonneau prescribe this digitalis?"

"No, Carbonneau did not occupy himself with the treatment."

"Then you prescribed it?"

"Yes."

"How long had Madame Claude been taking these pills?"

"For nearly a month. The chemist's books will indicate the precise date. I ordered one hundred pills of one millegramme each, and my wife began to take these pills the very next day. She took two a day—regularly, excepting during two days when I interrupted the treatment."

"That would make twenty-three days, and at the rate of two pills a day, she would have taken forty-six pills. There ought then to be fifty-four remaining."

"Yes."

"Where are these pills?"

"In a drawer in our room. They can be fetched for you."

"By and-bye. Now, please tell me how this—fatal attack began?"

"I was not present at the commencement."

"If I am not mistaken there were three attacks in all. You were not present at the first one, and you did not witness the beginning of the last one. That is correct, is it not?"

"Yes. Yesterday, after my consulting hour, I went out with my wife. We walked to Bourlandois; I, to see a patient, my wife for the sake of the exercise. The weather was fine, it was a delightful spring day, and I suggested the excursion to her. We walked very slowly. While I was attending to my patient, my wife sat on a bench in the garden. Then, instead of coming back to Condé direct, we went through the woods of La Rouvraye, where we strolled about for nearly three hours."

"Did you meet any one?"

"No—no one."

"And what did you do?"

"I have told you, we strolled about."

"During three hours?"

"Yes, during three hours."

"And after that?"

"We came back to Condé and separated at the outskirts of the town. I had to go and see two of my patients. My wife went straight home and took her pill of digitalis washed down with a drop of water."

"Who gave her the pill and the water?"

"She took the pill herself, the water was given her by the housemaid."

"Where?"

"In the dining-room."

"Where did this water come from?"

"I don't know."

"You have no reason to suppose that this water contained any poisonous ingredient?"

"Oh, certainly not."

"We will pause here for the present. I will now question your servants."

The housemaid was called, and soon arrived with a frightened air. She hardly dared to look at her master, and scarcely had she set eyes on him than she shuddered. This circumstance was noted both by the magistrates and by Claude. This girl evidently believed him to be guilty. After all he had undergone he did not think it possible to feel any fresh wound inflicted upon him, and yet he was keenly sensitive of this slight. What! here was a girl who knew better than any one else the close intimacy that had existed between him and his wife; a girl who had been in a position to note how great was their mutual love, and yet she believed him guilty! What then must be the sentiments of those who ignored their home life. What might not be the accusations of his enemies?

On being questioned, the housemaid related that she had brought her mistress a glass of water to the dining-room, which glass of water she had drawn from the filter in the kitchen, in the cook's presence. The latter servant was immediately called and confirmed the housemaid's narrative. She had seen the water drawn and she had also seen her mistress swallow a mouthful of it. The cook, like her fellow-servant, avoided looking at her master. As for Espérance, who was next sent for, he knew nothing at all of the matter. His attitude was however very different to that of the two women, and it was with emotion, with compassion even, that he repeatedly turned towards his master. He, at least, had retained his reason.

Claude's examination was then resumed at the point where it had been interrupted, and it now dealt with the various incidents of the previous night. Claude was obliged to recapitulate all the phases of Veronica's agony, giving precise details, and he suffered afresh at having to recall these scenes of torture and despair.

"Thus," said the investigating magistrate, "the other doctors

differ in opinion, but you are a doctor yourself, and you cannot have seen your wife die in your arms without having an opinion of your own, concerning the causes of her rapid death ?”

“I thought it was the result of an ulcerous formation at the heart, combined with capillary cerebral symptoms causing an obstruction of the arteries, but I must mention that I was less a doctor than a husband during this frightful night. The doctor examines his patient with all his calmness and intelligence. I retained neither my calmness nor the free exercise of my intelligence—I was overwhelmed, maddened.”

“However, that is your opinion ; we shall see how far it is correct. Now, another thing. Had any one an interest in your wife’s death ?”

“No one.”

“I mean a pecuniary interest. Who are Madame Claude’s natural heirs ?”

“Her nearest relative is Madame Gillet.”

“Was Madame Gillet near Madame Claude ? Did she attend on her ?”

“Madame Gillet has been away from Condé for the last fifteen or eighteen days. I believe she is at Verneuil with one of her aunts.”

“Even if we admitted that Madame Gillet were capable of committing a crime, she could not under these circumstances be suspected, despite the fact of her being your wife’s heir. At least she could not be accused of any direct action.”

“Madame Gillet would have been my wife’s heir if there was no legatee ; but my wife had made her will.”

“Do you know in whose favour ?”

“In my favour.”

“What is the date of that will ?”

“The 20th.”

“Of what month ?”

“This month. Last Friday in fact.”

“So she has died four days after making her will.” The investigating magistrate and the public prosecutor exchanged glances, and then a moment’s silence ensued. The investigating magistrate had made this last observation without any show of affectation, but it seemed all the more crushing for Claude. The logic of facts enveloped and overwhelmed him.

“Was she ill when she made her will ?” resumed the investigating magistrate.

“No.”

"Then how do you explain this idea of hers—in making her will?"

Claude related the circumstances of the visit of Cousin Quite-Well? and the conversations which he subsequently had with his wife and with Méréault.

"So," said the magistrate, "This will was meant as an answer to the gossip of the town?"

"Such was my wife's intention."

"And now it has become an accusation against you."

"An accusation of madness then; for only a madman would assassinate the person who made this will—on the morrow, so to say, of her doing so."

The investigating magistrate rose from his chair. "Now," said he, "please to conduct us into the room where the body is."

Claude gave a frightened look around, and his attitude betrayed a feeling of intense repugnance. What! were they free even to penetrate into his wife's room to satisfy their evil curiosity? The magistrates were examining him attentively—surprised by his manner, which they evidently did not understand, and asking themselves why he was afraid to take them into this apartment. Did he fear that this confrontation might lead him to betray himself?

"This request troubles you?" said the investigating magistrate.

"Yes, it does."

"You know, however, that it is an indispensable formality."

"Please to follow me."

But before leaving the consulting room the investigating magistrate whispered a few words in the ear of the silent personage who, until now, had remained standing before the window, and hereupon this individual, instead of going upstairs, went out of the house.

It was Claude who opened the bedroom door. The magistrates and the clerk entered the apartment, and while the last-named sat down in front of a table, MM. Bassaget and Legrain approached the bed. Claude had preceded them, and stood by the bedside as if to place himself between his wife and these men. The two magistrates did not speak, but they observed him most attentively, and as their eyes darted on him he felt a vague sensation of uneasiness. He knew that what the judicial authorities call the confrontation of the presumed delinquent with the victim is an element of conviction to which all magistrates attach a serious importance; and this knowledge sufficed

to provoke the feeling of uneasiness he experienced. Can even an innocent man support the look of suspicion descending into his heart and seeking to divine his thoughts without in a measure losing his self-possession? In this suspicion alone, is there not an outrage calculated to hurt the feelings of the firmest man? Should his cheeks glow with annoyance, this would be interpreted as fear; his tears would signify repentance; his impassibility would mean cruelty and hardness of heart. By what sign then would his innocence be recognised! The longer the silence became the more terrible it was for Claude. At length the investigating magistrate spoke—"Why have you done away with all traces of the illness?" he asked, "knowing as you did beforehand that you would be suspected, there is at least something singular in this haste."

It was not Claude who answered this question, but Mérault. He had hitherto remained in the corner where he was sitting when the magistrates entered, but he now stepped forward. "Far from doing away with the traces of the illness," he said, "we have carefully preserved them, or rather, I have preserved them, I—who could reason and in a measure foresee the suspicions of which you speak. Excepting as regards the first attack of sickness which took place in the garden, and the second which took place on the floor in this room, all the vomited matter has been preserved. Indeed, as regards the matter vomited during the second attack, my wife and I placed this large table over the stained flooring. This had been hastily wiped, it is true, but at a moment when it was impossible to foresee a fatal result. Thanks, however, to the precautions I took, without informing my friend, Claude, you will still find traces of this particular vomit on the woodwork. As for the body linen, my wife put it all together in the dressing-room. Finally, in this drawer you will find the box containing the pills of digitalis."

"Then your theory is that death was caused by the absorption of digitalis?"

"We have no theory," answered Mérault proudly, "or, rather if we have one, it is to say and to indicate all we think likely to assist in establishing the truth."

The investigating magistrate opened the drawer in which the pills were kept, and having taken the lid off the box he counted the number of pills remaining in it. There were fifty-four as Claude had led him to believe. The box was now bound round with a narrow ribbon, the ends of which were sealed with wax.

At this moment two discreet knocks were heard at the door. Claude was about to walk towards it, but the investigating magistrate forestalled him by calling out, "Come in!" The Law, not Claude, was now the master of the house. The door opened, and Dr. Evette entered the room, making as he did so a circular bow, which, if not addressed to any one in particular, might nevertheless be considered to include Claude among the other persons present.

"Doctor," said the investigating magistrate to Evette, "I have sent for you to examine the body of Madame Claude, and to deliver a certificate of death."

Evette appeared very annoyed and even grieved. It was only after a pause that he ventured to reply. "Pardon me, sir, I really cannot comply with your request. I must really ask you to withdraw it."

"That's impossible, sir."

"But knowing as you do my position with regard to my colleague, I trust that you will abstain from taking those legal steps which would compel me to obey your order."

"On the contrary," said the public prosecutor, "I shall take those steps at once." Then, turning towards the clerk, he dictated to him as follows:—

"We, Public Prosecutor, &c., in virtue of clauses 32 and 43 of the Criminal Investigation Code, order Dr. Evette to examine and deliver a certificate of the death of Veronica Claude, *née* Lerissel, and if requisite, to perform the autopsy of her remains."

Evette interrupted the magistrate with a smile. "I beg your pardon," he said, "but would it not be as well to replace the word 'autopsy,' which really has no sense, by 'necropsy,' which is the proper term. I think that it would be fitting for a man of your attainments to set aside this faulty, though frequently employed, expression. I had long meant to make the suggestion, and I profit of this most favourable opportunity to do so now."

"Very well, we will write necropsy as you suggest."

At first Claude, who was still near the bed, had paid no attention to this dialogue which was going on at the other end of the room. He was thinking of the dear departed, and not of what these men were saying. But the word "necropsy" caught his ear. With a few hasty strides he approached the magistrates. His limbs trembled, and his face was livid. "Oh, gentlemen," he exclaimed, "you will not have that done?"

"Have what done?" asked the investigating magistrate, as if he had not understood.

"You will not have that odious operation performed? I, gentlemen, am at your disposal. Do with me what you like. Question me, suspect me, let me suffer every suspicion, every accusation, but her— Oh, I beg you, spare her that outrage."

"What, a doctor talk like that?" said the public prosecutor.

"I have already told you," cried Claude with an irresistible outburst, "that here I am not a doctor. It is a man, a fellow creature, who speaks to you, who begs you—"

"But it is a magistrate, not a man, who answers you that it is impossible to comply with your request. You know that the law has many rigorous, pitiless exigencies." So saying, he resumed the dictation of his instructions to Dr. Evette.

Claude was forced to hear the words which followed, each one of which was a bitter wound. "Note any indications of crime—examine the viscera—analyse the vomited matter—determine if this matter contains any poisonous substance—" Again the public prosecutor paused. It was to call on Evette to take an oath by which he swore to fulfil this mission honourably and faithfully.

The two magistrates next exchanged a few words in a low voice. Then the investigating magistrate turned towards Claude. "Would you like to be present at the necropsy?" he asked.

Claude's only answer was a cry and a gesture of horror.

"I simply made this proposal in your own interest."

"Ah, sir, my interest is of no matter now. Am I your prisoner?"

"No; only you must remain at my disposal without communicating with any one."

"Then have me escorted to my consulting room." But before leaving the bedchamber he stepped back towards the bed, and taking his wife in his arms, he kissed her. Then suddenly turning round, he cried, "Gentlemen, what you are going to do is horrible!"

Mérault came to him, grasped his hand, and led him slowly away. As he reached the magistrates, Claude halted. "Gentlemen," he said in a supplicating voice—"Gentlemen—" They remained, however, impassible.

The military-looking personage was standing near the door. He opened it and accompanied Claude into the consulting room. While Claude, distracted with anger and despair, walked rapidly

to and fro, this individual took a chair and sat down near the door leading into the hall.

Claude was destined on this fatal day to drain the cup of anguish. The accusation levelled at him was now as nothing; he did not think of it. Heart and mind had gone back to his wife, and he saw her corpse in Evette's hands, with the magistrates looking on. Another might have ignored what was transpiring in that room overhead. But he, a doctor, knew the truth only too well.

Each succeeding minute seemed an eternity of torture. At length the door opened, and the investigating magistrate with his clerk entered the room. "I have come," he said, "to make you acquainted with the summary results of the post mortem examination."

"You can see that I am scarcely in a state to listen to you, much less to answer you."

"It is at least necessary that you should listen to me." So saying, the investigating magistrate took a sheet of paper from the clerk, and proceeded to read Evette's report. It plainly pointed to a violent death, caused by some poison, which, of course, in so brief a time, could not be properly determined, and it declared that there were no traces in any way corroborating the theory which Claude had formed relative to the cause of death. Claude felt overwhelmed, and as the magistrate repeated the scientific terms in which the report abounded, he saw that he had been grievously in error.

"Well, what have you to say?" enquired the magistrate.

"Nothing."

"Then you abandon your theory?"

Claude did not answer.

The investigating magistrate allowed an interval of some duration to elapse. "Under these circumstances," he ultimately said, "it is my duty to issue a warrant for your arrest."

XX.

THE investigating magistrate's words did not affect Claude. He expected this arrest, and in a measure he was prepared for it. But on the other hand he was thunderstruck with the conclusions of Evette's report. So then he had been mistaken, and Carbonneau likewise had been in error. Yet might it not

be Evette who had blundered, who had not perceived what he ought to have seen? In refusing to be present at the necropsy, which Claude might have controlled, he had taken a grave resolution fraught with terrible consequences; and yet he would not act differently to what he had done, were the proposition made to him over again. If he were destined to succumb in this struggle with the law, in which everything seemingly united to crush him, at all events he would retain a noble souvenir of his wife's pure beauty, and his recollection of Veronica would not be tainted by the memory of that hideous operation.

The warrant having been drawn up, the investigating magistrate made a sign. At once the door, behind which a sound of footsteps had for some minutes been heard, was thrown open, and in the shadow of the hall Claude caught a glimpse of the yellow facings and white trimmings of a familiar uniform. A detachment of gendarmes was waiting to conduct him to prison. He could not restrain a shudder and instinctively threw himself back.

The brigadier entered the room and having received the warrant turned towards Claude. At this moment an uproar was heard in the hall—a babel of words, dominated by a woman's voice. "I tell you I will enter." And at the same instant, pushing aside the gendarme who guarded the door, she who had spoken rushed into the room.

It was Nathalie—flushed, panting, excited beyond control. She would have sprung towards Claude but the brigadier quickly placed himself in front of his prisoner. Then turning towards the investigating magistrate as if to call him to her assistance she exclaimed, "Monsieur Legrain!"

But the investigating magistrate did not budge. He contented himself with saluting her with an inclination of the head.

"Tell me it is not true!" cried Nathalie. "It cannot be—it is impossible, surely you are not arresting my cousin?"

If this remark had been made to him by a man, no matter however high his position, the investigating magistrate would assuredly have disdained to reply—it was for him to question, not to be questioned—but then the speaker was a woman, and this man of the law had always had a weakness for the sex.

"Madame," he said politely, "a great misfortune has occurred in this house during your absence. Your charming cousin has died a violent death; there are grave charges against Dr.

Claude, and my duty compels me to have him arrested on the suspicion of poisoning his wife."

"It is impossible!"

"Do you possess, madame, any knowledge that leads you to assert the impossibility. If such be the case I am prepared to listen to you."

There was a moment's silent pause. Nathalie was standing in the front of the investigating magistrate, pale, excited, looking at him, then glancing at Claude, but without uttering a word.

It was Claude who spoke and he addressed himself to Nathalie. "Your words," he said, "can at present only have any importance for *me*. I thank you for your testimony, but let the law follow its course."

Mérault had re-entered the room an instant previously. He now took two steps forward. "Yes," said he, "let the law follow its course. We shall defend ourselves at the proper time. Do not forget, my friend, that your honour is mine."

Nathalie would have spoken, but Mérault took hold of her hand and asked her not to do so. "We shall have our turn," he said.

At a signal from his officer, the gendarme who guarded the door placed himself at Claude's right hand and then the brigadier preceded them into the hall. Claude's head was bare, he had not changed his clothes since the preceding day, nor had he even attempted to modify his disordered appearance. He was about to leave the house in this state when Nathalie, who had followed him, held out a hat and an overcoat. Her gesture in doing so was so similar to Veronica's that it strangely impressed him. He turned round and with a rapid glance he surveyed this house where he had passed so many happy hours. A little scarf was hanging on one of the hall pegs—the same scarf that Veronica had worn during their walk on the day before. He stretched out his arm to take it, but at the same moment the gendarme at his side seized him by the wrist.

Claude did not attempt resistance but looking at the gendarme, he said. "It could not be a dangerous weapon either against you or against myself. Why not let me take it?" The gendarme loosened his grasp and Claude placed the scarf in his pocket.

The hall door had been thrown open. A confused murmur reached Claude's ears. Evidently a number of inquisitive folks were standing outside on the boulevard, waiting for his appear-

ance. He was not mistaken in this surmise and as he reached the threshold of the courtyard he had to encounter the stare of a dense crowd—not merely a few curious sight-seers, but a large proportion of the townsfolk, mingled with numerous peasants, for this had been market morning. Men and boys, moreover, had climbed into the surrounding trees whence a bird's-eye view of the scene was presented. When Claude appeared a perfect clamour arose. Two gendarmes who had been waiting on the footway opened the march, Claude following, with the brigadier on his left and a third gendarme on his right hand. He did not recognise any one in that mass of staring faces. Indeed, he looked without seeing just as he listened without hearing.

The prison of Condé, installed like all the other public services of the locality in the old castle or *château* which has given its name to the town, was not far from Claude's house, but the crowd was so dense, that he and his escort could only advance very slowly; and some time elapsed before they reached the *Porte des Juvigneurs* by which the prison is entered. The sound of the heavy knocker which the brigadier hastily raised, entered Claude's heart. The door was opened and then closed again. He was in prison.

It seemed to Claude as if he were in a dream. He was only conscious of the fact that he was led up a stone staircase, that he passed along several dark passages, that he went down fresh staircases and traversed fresh corridors. When he came to himself again, he was alone in a large lofty cell, with a vaulted stone roof. Three yards from the ground this cell was lighted by an oblique aperture in the outer wall, which was here more than twelve feet thick. The furniture was composed of an iron bedstead, a chair, a pail, and a plank fixed against the wall and doing duty as a table. Had it not been for the iron bedstead one might have fancied oneself in some *in pace* of the middle ages.

But what did it matter to Claude that he was in prison! He had sunk upon the chair and gazed mechanically at the objects around him. Still, outward things did not pre-occupy his mind. His sufferings were in his heart. The hours passed by, and at length the door opened. The chief jailor appeared and asked him what he would like for dinner. He had not eaten since lunching with Veronica, prior to their walk the day before. His fast had now lasted thirty hours, but he paid no attention to this circumstance. Instead of replying to the jailor's question, he asked him to bring him a pen, ink, and paper.

"The rules forbid my doing so," was the answer, "you must have a special permission."

"Cannot you obtain that permission for me? Besides, I only want a single sheet of paper to write a letter to the investigating magistrate. When I have written it you can take the pen and ink away again."

Some time afterwards the jailor returned with what he had been asked for; and, in his presence, Claude began to write as follows:

"Sir,—I have a supreme request to make to you. I desire your permission to be present at my wife's funeral. You can have me escorted by the gendarmes. You can have me handcuffed if you are afraid of my attempting to escape; you can have me surrounded by as many agents as you please, to prevent me from communicating with any one whatsoever—I shall not complain. I only ask one thing—to be allowed to follow her remains to the cemetery, to live beside her for an instant, to see the spot where she is buried. I implore this mercy and I trust that your sentiments of humanity will lead you to grant the prayer of one who is so cruelly wounded, both in his love and his honour."

Would this request be granted! This was the question that Claude asked himself all night long; the hope to which he persistently clung; for the consolation of hope remains even to the most miserable.

On the following morning the jailor brought him an answer. It was couched as follows:

"As Doctor Claude is to be kept in solitary confinement, it is impossible to grant his request."

By dint of reasoning, Claude had persuaded himself that his application could not be refused. The deception was therefore a terrible one. It was only by the bells of St. Etienne that he knew of his wife's funeral. The first toll apprised him that the clergy had set out for the house to receive the body; the second, that the cortege was entering the church; the third, that the procession was leaving for the cemetery. The bells suddenly ceased tolling, the last vibrations died away. It was all over. All over for her; but for him?

Never before had there been so many people at a funeral in Condé; and never before had the town witnessed such a noisy unimpressive funeral. Even those who were devotees by profession scarcely paid any attention to the ceremony. The crime alone occupied people's minds; for it was now generally

considered that a crime had been committed. Few indeed were they who timidly dared to express a doubt on the subject. "Poor little woman!" quoth one.

"The monster!" exclaimed another.

"Madame Gillet's grief is painful to behold."

"She's a perfect corpse."

"And people said she did not love her cousin!"

"Ah, how wicked the world is!"

"See how affected the poor woman appears to be."

When the ceremony was over, old Caradon stepped out of the crowd and took Mèrault's arm. "I fancy," said he, "that of all the people here, there are only you and I who believe in poor Claude's innocence; but shall we be able to save him?"

"Surely we will!"

"You speak with the beautiful assurance of youth, but I, I reason with the sad experience of old age. We are only two, and they—they are everybody. I am very much afraid that he is lost."

BOOK V.

I.

CLAUDE had been kept in solitary confinement for nearly four months, although it is a principle in the French judicial world that this practice should only be pursued with moderation, since it predisposes the prisoner to commit suicide. Yet, in Claude's case, the magistrates showed themselves particularly severe. Neither Mèrault, despite all his applications and complaints, nor Nathalie, who had moved heaven and earth in her attempts to see the prisoner, were able to penetrate into his prison. The formalities requisite for the prolongation of this confinement were scrupulously observed. Every month the public prosecutor forwarded to the Keeper of the Seals a report, setting forth that according to the magistrates who were investigating the charge, it was necessary in the interest of arriving at the truth, that Claude should not be allowed to communicate with any one. In virtue of these reports, the Keeper of the Seals invariably authorised the authorities to retain their prisoner

"au secret." The law was unfortunately against Claude, and hard as it might be, he had no alternative but to submit to it.

During the two first days of his captivity, Claude was served by a single jailor; but on the third day the latter was provided with an assistant, and henceforward Claude never found himself alone with any one individual. A third person was invariably present; this course being undoubtedly adopted with the view of preventing any attempt at corruption. So far as material things were concerned, the prisoner was not harshly treated; and, indeed, he was granted any favour that he asked for with the view of improving the arrangements of his cell. Additional furniture was procured for him, and he had all he desired in the way of books, linen, and food. Directly the books entered the prison, however, they were not allowed to leave it, lest they should convey some secret communication outside; while his food, before being served to him, was invariably cut up in small pieces, lest it should conceal any missive from one or another of his friends. Accordingly, during these four months Claude learnt nothing of what was going on in the town, of what was said concerning him, or of what Méraült might be attempting for his defence. It was through the investigating magistrate alone that he became acquainted with the detailed reports of the experts. The latter were two in number, Evette and a young chemist of the town named Senelle, who was specially charged with the chemical analysis of the victim's organs and of the matter she had vomited. These reports were crushing for Claude. They declared that Madame Claude was not subject to any disease capable of causing death, and that she had died poisoned, from having absorbed, either knowingly or involuntarily, some venenous substance, which it was impossible to isolate by chemical means, but which had acted both on her heart and stomach.

If Claude was perfectly ignorant of what was going on in the town, the town was equally ignorant of what was passing in the prison. No one knew how Dr. Claude was supporting his captivity, or how he defended himself against the terrible charge brought against him. And yet, if nothing precise were known on these subjects, it was not for want of trying to acquire information. The public curiosity was intense, and in drawing-rooms, shops, and work-rooms alike, every one talked about the "*Affaire Claude*," and strove to fathom the mystery in which the magistrates were shrouding their investigations.

Whenever the jailors crossed the threshold of the prison,

they encountered all manner of friends eager to offer them "a glass of something" at the café or the dram shop. Senelle, the chemist, on his part had never had such custom before, and from morn till night his shop was constantly frequented. Never had he sold such quantities of cough lozenges, and there were country folks who came a distance of ten leagues to ask him for "something good for the blood," all in hopes of picking up some little information about the "Affaire Claude." Evette, moreover, could not get rid of his patients, who were now the first to accost him in the street, instead of having to be run after as in former times. They carried their curiosity so far that even the most parsimonious asked him to come and see them, not that they required his advice in the least degree, but simply to induce him to talk on the topic of the hour. But the individual on whom all eyes were fixed, who had been elevated to the position of premier oracle, was M. Legrain, the investigating magistrate.

Despite his judicial functions, M. Legrain had hitherto had very few friends in the upper society of Condé; and, indeed, most of the local magistrates had systematically shown him the cold shoulder. The circumstances that had led to his being "sent to Coventry" were looked upon by the townsfolk as perfect crimes. In the first place, he was poor—and more than poor—being always hard up and in debt. Then he had been compromised in two or three love affairs which had caused a perfect scandal; the worst of it being that the heroines of his adventures had not belonged to good society. One was a carpenter's wife, another a dressmaker, a third a laundress. Again, he did not attempt to keep up a position. He had no house of his own, but occupied merely two rooms on a second floor. He neglected his personal appearance, and carried the odours of his pipe about with him; no matter wherever he went. In addition, he was a thorough sceptic, without either political or religious belief—a fact which he did not in the least degree attempt to conceal. Thus it came to pass that although he was the light of the local tribunal, where his intelligence, capacity, and activity did everything; not merely his own work but also that of others—especially that of President Bonhomme de la Fardonyère, who, without his assistance would have been incapable of drawing up a judgment twenty lines long. Thus it was, that until the sensation created by the "Affaire Claude." M. Legrain had remained excluded from the society in which all his colleagues, even those of the lowest

rank, occupied a position compatible with their functions. But on the day when the slighted magistrate became the only person who was acquainted with the circumstances under which Madame Claude had been poisoned, his situation changed completely. "In reality," said the members of the Condé upper ten, "he is not so deeply in debt as was imagined. No doubt it is singular to find a magistrate's name coupled with a dress-maker's, but then, some of those girls are good looking and even decently educated. If he shows no religious convictions nor political opinions, it is not because he is sceptical, but because he is prudent. In real truth he certainly has the same convictions and opinions as ourselves." Finally, Condé society discovered that M. Legrain no longer smelt of tobacco; and those who would have formerly been highly indignant if they had been asked to sit beside him at a friend's house, now endeavoured to discover a pretext to invite him to their own abodes. "Come to dinner next Tuesday, we shall have M. Legrain." "Really?" "Yes, he has formally accepted my invitation. One has been very unjust towards him. He is a man of remarkable intelligence." "Oh, assuredly." "For my part, I want to repair the past injustice of society. It is a matter of principle." "I quite agree with you, and if you will place me next to him at dinner, I will try and second your efforts."

Although M. Legrain was well aware of the interested motives which had made him an object of such general attention, he nevertheless thought fit to accept the numerous invitations sent to him. In the first place, he was fond of good dinners and high-class wines. He owed his butcher 400 francs, and this tradesman, tired of receiving little sums on account, had long since threatened to cut off his credit. Then, moreover, he liked the society of the fair sex, even when the latter were neither dressmakers nor laundresses. He could also hold his own in any intellectual conversation, so that with his susceptible character, he had a host of good reasons to accept whatever invitations were addressed to him. But in accepting an invitation to dinner, M. Legrain did not accept an invitation to speak, and the most amiable smiles and the best wines failed alike to loosen his tongue. Without ever greeting those who questioned him in a surly manner, without ever relying for support on the importance of his functions, he had always known how to say, in an amiable tone, with an engaging smile or a witty word, just what he was willing to say—literally nothing at all—and

he had done this so adroitly, that the questioner was always convinced that his interrogatory would have a better result on the next occasion.

By questioning Evette and the chemist, some little information had been obtained, but still not the information that people hoped for. Indeed, the experts were bound to be very reserved. And there was something more than reserve that kept their mouths closed—namely, ignorance. How could they say what poison had killed Madame Claude, when they did not know themselves? Hence their mysterious replies, their reticence, their finessing and fencing with the questions addressed to them—greatly to the exasperation of all those who thought they had a right to ask and to know everything they pleased.

“When one pays for a doctor’s visit,” these disappointed folks would say, “without requiring his advice, he ought at all events to be of some use. If there hadn’t been a fellow doctor in the case, Evette would probably be more outspoken, but professional etiquette apparently closes his mouth.”

“I should never have thought,” another malcontent would observe, “that Dr. Evette was capable of showing so little confidence in his patients. He ought to know very well that we should not go and repeat whatever he might tell us to the first comer.”

The chemist had his share in the anger and discontent which was gradually aroused. At first every one was very pleased to learn that instead of sending to Paris or Caen or Rouen for a chemist, the public prosecutor had chosen Senelle. This choice was an honour for Claude. “Little Senelle,” the gossips said, “is a very clever fellow.” Every one thought that if he did not let them see him operate, at least he would tell them everything. But when it was discovered that he neither let them see anything nor told them anything, public opinion changed concerning him, and instead of being a “very clever fellow,” he became a “beggary little chemist,” who did not say anything, because he knew nothing. Would not the authorities have done better had they chosen a chemist of note? If Dr. Claude had really poisoned his wife, he had probably taken sufficient precautions to defy little Senelle’s science.

But as if these motives of discontent did not suffice to make the experts most unpopular, an incident occurred which excited the indignation of the whole town. One night a poor devil who swept the streets was surprised in the act of putting a little dog into a sack, which he continually carried over his shoulders.

For some time previous, several cats and dogs had been lost without any one being able to account for their disappearance. On being closely questioned the unfortunate street-sweeper eventually admitted that it was he who had stolen these animals with the view of selling them to Dr. Evette, who paid a franc a piece for them.

So it was Evette, who in his incapacity to discover what poison had killed Madame Claude, was killing the cats and dogs of Condé by making experiments upon them. A perfect explosion of indignation followed this discovery, and one old lady "learned in the law" brought an action against the experts, claiming 2000 francs damages from them for having poisoned her pet dog.

II.

HOWEVER much the authorities may have desired to keep Claude in solitary confinement, there at length came a time when they were obliged to grant Mérault permission to communicate with his client. It must be admitted that one young legal official, a firm believer in the public prosecutor's omnipotence, suggested that the advocate and the prisoner should only be allowed to see each other in the presence of witnesses, and as this official was a clever fellow, well versed in precedents, he quoted several examples in support of his idea. He did not, however, have the satisfaction of seeing it adopted. He was answered that matters must not be carried to extremes, that four months' solitary confinement was somewhat severe, and that by going any further the public might be induced to sympathise with the prisoner, which would be most deplorable. On the other hand, M. Legrain called attention to the fact that one was now on the eve of the elections, and that Mérault had every chance of being returned as deputy, in opposition to, and in place of, Count Prétavoine. Under these circumstances, it was not worth while to place one's self in the bad-books of a man who, one day or another, might become Minister of Justice and Keeper of the Seals. Mérault Keeper of the Seals! Why not? In the French political world all manner of extraordinary things come to pass.

Claude had not been warned that his advocate was about to be allowed to communicate with him, and when the jailors came to fetch him from his cell one morning, he thought it was

to undergo some fresh examination by the investigating magistrate. Accordingly, when he found himself in face of M^{er}aault, he was overcome with emotion. He was obliged to sit down. His weakness was extreme—not, however, for want of food—it was captivity and solitude that had crushed his former energy. He had become a complete child, he said, or rather an old man, and was in a fair way of becoming a madman.

M^{er}aault desired to revive his friend. He drew out of his portfolio a little box, and having opened it, he showed Claude a half-blown rose, carefully laid upon a bed of damp moss. Then handing Claude the box, he exclaimed:—"This is what Madame Gillet sends you, she plucked that rose this morning from a rose tree planted on *her* grave."

The tears gathered in Claude's eyes. M^{er}aault respected his friend's emotion, and did not speak to him any further. But, on the other hand, he scrutinized him attentively. He noted that Claude was no longer the healthful, vigorous man of four months ago. His back was bent; he seemed less tall, as if, during those four months, some heavy burden had weighed him down. The change was greatest, however, in his face. It was very pale; deep wrinkles crossed his forehead; his eyelids were lowered, his cheeks sunken, and his lips drawn down.

"Where does she lie?" asked Claude, raising his head, which had been bent forward looking at the rose.

"At the further end of the cemetery, against the wall, and near the central avenue. We have not ordered any tombstone, being desirous of reserving you that consolation for the day when you are acquitted. Flowers have, however, been planted on the grave, and Madame Gillet and Denise attend to them."

"You must thank them for me. In my despair, terrible as it has been, I never once doubted of your dear wife's friendship, nor of your own."

"Well, here I am, and now we must occupy ourselves with the future, with your defence. First of all, I have a question to ask you, and I want you to answer it without your being tied down by friendly feelings. Study yourself alone, for your life and honour are at stake. Who will you choose as leading counsel for your defence?"

"I desire to be defended by you only. Even if my esteem and friendship did not lead me to select you, I have an all-powerful reason to place myself in your hands—in your hands alone—namely, the last words that my poor wife said to you: 'You will defend Etienne.' Her wish is sacred."

"But it would not prevent my sharing the task. I desire to share it. I am not so confident in myself as I am in the justice of your cause. My abilities are limited. Why not procure the services of one of the celebrities of the Paris bar?"

"My dear M^r M^érault, I understand the sentiment that leads you to speak in that manner, and I am deeply touched by it, I assure you. But I will have no other advocate than you—I will have none other, because I have full confidence in you—in your talents and your devotion."

"But——"

"Allow me. My own interest, it seems to me, requires that such should be the case. You enjoy a well-deserved reputation in the district. Every one knows what you are worth. What would people think of me if I placed over you some celebrity of the Paris bar? Would they not say that I must feel my cause to be a very difficult one to defend not to have full confidence in a man like you? A few steps more, and they would consider and pronounce me guilty. The jury must not be under this impression. Yes, it is true my cause is a difficult one—a very difficult one—but it would be quite as difficult for another as for you. If we don't win, it will not be your fault, but the fault of circumstances. You see that I have no illusions. I understand the severity with which I am treated, and I don't reproach those who accuse me. Evidently, appearances are against me, and the charges they support are terrible; they crush me."

"They may have crushed you while you had to bear them unaided; but now we are two to bear them."

"Certainly. I have full faith in your skill and talent; but, after all, skill and talent are powerless against evidence. Now, the evidence is that my wife was killed by poison acting on the heart. The experts are in the right. The symptoms are those of a case of poisoning by some substance acting on the heart and the stomach. I should come to the same conclusion as they have come to."

"But they can't say what poison it is."

"No doubt; and that circumstance is in my favour; but the symptoms are against me. I myself can say, 'Those symptoms are misleading, for I know she only took a pill of digitalis; I know by the analysis that her pills were properly prepared, so that she only absorbed a milledigramme of digitalis each time; I know, moreover, that the mouthful of water she swallowed contained no poisonous substance, for all that remained of this

water has been analysed ; I know that no one approached her during the day save myself ; and, consequently, it is impossible that she can have been poisoned.' But then, on the other hand, the men of the law will show that there was some one with her during the greater part of the day—some one alone with her—in a manner that may have been premeditated. Hence the magistrates say 'that some one is guilty.' This is logical ; and when in addition to this circumstance there is that of the will, how is it possible not to believe in a crime ?"

"You are pleading against yourself."

"No, my friend, I am pleading for your benefit. I am showing you how difficult your task will be. But that does not imply that I will renounce defending myself ; on the contrary, I will fight to the end, as long as I have any strength left me !"

"Well, it is with the view of arranging your defence that I am here. What is your opinion ? What do you want me to do ?"

Mérault had first of all felt very frightened. He had believed in a case of complete prostration, an utter absence of will, absolute despair, but the energy with which Claude exclaimed, "I will fight to the end," had re-assured him. Confinement had not completely crushed that once vigorous mind ; and after all, Claude would still speak and act like a man, in presence of the jury.

"As you may well believe," said Claude, "since I have lived between these four walls, I have had full time to think over my defence. When a prisoner is guilty, he adopts a system and sticks to it. But when one is innocent, it seems to me that there's no system to adopt. One must bend one's self to circumstances and accept them such as they are, despite the contradictions they may offer. To deny the symptoms of my wife's illness, would be quite as absurd as to deny the fact of her making her will. The symptoms and the will exist, therefore we accept them ; but we maintain that they do not point to the conclusions our adversaries have drawn. That is my defence, my friend, and it is only by following this line that I can extricate myself from this terrible accusation. But, in addition, I can only do so by being assisted."

"So you shall be."

"I don't speak of you—but of the witnesses I need. First of all it is necessary to demolish the reports of the two experts, and to show that their conclusions are faulty, particularly when they say that 'It is so evident that Madame Claude was poisoned, that we have poisoned animals with the matter she vomited.' That does not at all prove my guilt as they pretend.

But it is neither you nor I who can explain that fact to the jury."

"You desire a counter-examination and experiments?"

"Precisely. You will entrust my friend Vandam with the duty of making this counter-examination, or at all events with that of examining the experts' report. If I choose Vandam, although his name is not imposing, it is because like you he is my friend, and I have full confidence in his learning. I can thus be certain that my interests will be as well defended by him from a scientific point of view, as by you from a criminal aspect."

"I have nothing to say against such a choice. Like you I don't care for a needless admixture of notorious or famous names."

"There will be one of the latter at all events. Besides the later reports of the experts, there is the *procès verbal* of the necropsy drawn up by Evette in a very incomplete fashion. This also must be vigorously attacked. Carbonneau will undertake that task. Carbonneau examined Veronica, and he is to a certain measure engaged in the affair by his diagnosis. He will not refuse me his evidence and support."

"He owes you his evidence."

"And he will give me his support. He is not a man to allow himself to be intimidated by public clamour. We require at least a man of his authority to silence Evette."

"The more so as the latter will not be alone."

"Now there only remains for me to mention to you one point of importance. We must prove that despite the will in my favour, I could not have poisoned my wife, as the interests of the love I had for her were in flagrant opposition to any pecuniary interest I might have had in her death. I must therefore ask you to occupy yourself in collecting evidence to prove how great was our mutual attachment. This will be the sorest point in all the trials for I should have preferred to cast a veil over our affection. Still, I perceive that I must resign myself to this sacrifice. The witness who in this respect can excite the greatest influence on the jury is Madame Mèrault—she saw the dawn of our affection, she saw it increase, she saw it also in its zenith."

"It seems to me, moreover, that Madame Gillet's evidence on this subject would be of great importance."

"Yes, no doubt,—Madame Gillet might be called."

Thus their conversation lasted; the remainder of the interview being devoted to planning in detail the line of defence which Claude had already roughly sketched.

III.

THE date of the assizes was drawing nigh. The session was not to commence however with Claude's trial. The three first days would be taken up with four or five insignificant cases—thefts and assaults—and during these the bench and the public prosecutor would grow acquainted with the jury, and so arrange matters as to gain their confidence. The president would then talk of indulgence, and praise that excellent custom of appending to a verdict of guilty a rider of “attenuating circumstances,” whereby the interests of society and humanity are appropriately conciliated. Then also the public prosecutor, equally indulgent and moderate, would be heard exclaiming, “What will you think, gentlemen of the jury, at seeing the functionary whom society has posted as its advanced sentinel, hesitate in his mission? Will you not think that I am abandoning my post, that I am unworthy of it? When I studied this affair I was determined to oppose the admission of attenuating circumstances, I was determined to oppose them most energetically, but after beholding this unfortunate young man's attitude in court, after hearing his sobs, after witnessing all his signs of repentance, I can no longer disapprove of your mitigating an affirmative verdict by the admission of attenuating circumstances.” If after that the jury was not convinced that it could grant that excellent presiding judge and that humane public prosecutor all they asked for, if it was not convinced that it could believe all they said, even with its eyes closed, then it would be the most extraordinary jury that had ever been empanelled. But such a contingency was not to be feared. Juries are easily caught with honeyed words.

When the presiding judge and the public prosecutor had thus won the jury over to their side, the turn would come for Claude to step into the dock. Then, however, indulgence could be no longer talked of, but the court would appeal to the firmness and severity of those twelve high-minded citizens who were the delegates of indignant thousands, and a verdict implying capital punishment might be hoped for.

Claude's trial would occupy the greater part of the session and it was not possible to determine beforehand exactly how many days should be allotted to it. At all events, it had been

decided to amplify it as far as practicable. The presiding judge and the public prosecutor were united on this point in the hope that the occasion would bring them into public notice not merely in Condé, but throughout France. They had long been waiting for a sensational trial, and now that they had one within their reach, they were not going to weaken its importance. So much the worse for the jurymen if they found the time long. The presiding judge would know how to control them. After all they only had to sit still and listen; and then one day or another they would be called upon to answer "yes" or "no." In the meantime, the bench would know how to stimulate their attention.

The presiding judge was to be that same M. Hairies de la Freslonière who had already presided at the Condé assizes at the epoch of the Vilaine trial, in which Claude had played so important a part. This time, however, the latter would appear before M. Hairies de la Freslonière, not as an expert, but as a prisoner.

The presiding judge installed himself in his Château du Camp Héroult, and on the morrow after lunch, he came to Condé to question Claude in accordance with the prescriptions of the law. His interrogatory was however of a purely formal character, Claude was conducted into the judge's presence, and the latter, after assuring himself of the prisoner's identity, contented himself with acquainting him of the charge he had to answer—"What have you to say?" he asked, "Are you guilty, or not guilty?"

"I am not guilty."

Without entering into any discussion, the judge turned towards his clerk—"Write that he asserts he is not guilty, and that he never administered to his wife any poisonous substance capable of causing her death." Then, turning towards Claude, he said with affected good nature—"That's it, isn't it?"

"Certainly, but I should like to observe to you, Monsieur le Président, that—"

"Oh if you want to plead your cause, I warn you that this is neither the place nor the time. Reserve yourself. You will be able to tell the jury everything you fancy useful for your defence."

Claude had imagined that this interrogatory was a serious matter, that he would be able to explain himself, and expose his line of defence to the judge—possibly convince him that he was

innocent, an all important point when it was remembered that this magistrate could control the trial. He was therefore stupefied at the careless manner in which the formality was accomplished. The presiding judge who walked up and down with his hands in his pockets had apparently only one idea, that of getting rid of the business as soon as possible. "It is not necessary I suppose to ask you if you have an advocate?" he said.

"Yes I have one, M. Louis M^érault."

"Very well then. Your affair is set down for the 4th."

With a gesture of the hand the judge signified that the interview was over; but Claude showed no signs of leaving the room. "I have a request to make to you," he said, "I should like to communicate with several people. I have been in solitary confinement during four months."

The presiding judge assumed an air of remarkable good nature "What's the use of your doing so?" he said, "your affair will be tried in a few days—on the 4th. You see you haven't long to wait."

"But I have been more than four months in prison."

"It isn't our fault. The experts took such a long time. If you had confessed, matters would have been more easily settled. I assure you no time has been lost."

"I don't complain, Monsieur le Président. I am not speaking of the past but of the present."

"I engage you in your own interest, not to insist. These communications prior to trial are not at all advisable. It is much better that you should come into court in a sober state of mind."

"But—"

"Do you want me to refuse you formally?"

Claude left the room without insisting any further—as he crossed the threshold he heard the judge say to his clerk, "Isn't it funny, eh? they all want to make some communication!"

M. Hairies de la Freslonière was particularly anxious that the interview should terminate, for he had a pressing appointment with the town architect with the view of so arranging the assize court, as to afford accommodation for all those who had applied to him for seats during Claude's trial. The hall in which the assizes were held, dated from the XVIIth century. Of its primitive decorations it only retained a heavy embossed ceiling. For ordinary cases, its dimensions were ample enough,

but so many people were desirous of being present at this *cause célèbre*, that it was necessary to erect platforms and dispose benches in every available corner. The space allotted to the ordinary public, was moreover greatly curtailed, to admit of the placing of supplementary seats for those to whom the president had forwarded special invitations.

M. Hairies de la Freslonière controlled this transformation of the assize court in person, and indeed it was urgent that he should do so, for he must keep the multitudinous promises he had made under penalty of provoking great discontent, and of converting many useful friends into enemies. He had had a stock of cards printed, yellow, green, pink, white, and scarlet ones, a special colour being allotted to each succeeding day of the trial. Few indeed were those privileged persons who would have their seat in court throughout the hearing of the case. By giving one person a card for the first day, another a card for the second, and so on, the presiding judge hoped to content a great number of friends and acquaintances. He was moreover anxious that the audience should be a changing one, and that as many people as possible should witness him performing his *rôle* and accord him their applause. For it was a studied part that he was about to play, and the assize court was to be the theatre. Thus it was that he took every precaution so that the drama enacted might prove successful. There must be no hitch in the performance, either as regards the prisoner, the jury, or the audience. The house must be a good one; easily moved to tears, and easily incited to laughter. Now to have a good house it is necessary that the spectators should be well seated. More than one theatrical venture has failed owing to the playwright's friends being packed away in uncomfortable corners.

"Not too many chairs," quoth the judge to the architect. "You must see that every one will be able to stretch his legs. People get into a bad humour when their blood doesn't circulate. Moreover, there must be sufficient room for the witnesses to pass to and fro. There is nothing so disagreeable as to hear a chair knocked over; it distracts attention."

When once the spectators were well seated, the presiding judge undertook to interest them: never hesitating to intervene in person whenever attention appeared to flag. He was prompt at repartee, and, if he could only think of a trivial or even a coarse remark, he did not scruple to make it. When there was seemingly no prospect of a joke he manœuvred so as to provoke

one. And if his natural wit was in default he opened his code at a certain page where he had inserted a leaf of paper on which a number of trite axioms, applicable to any trial, were jotted down. A minute later, he invariably found the occasion of applying one or another of these sayings. Indeed, it mattered little to him whether his proverb or paradox was precisely in point or not ; all that was essential was that his utterance should attract public attention. For it would have been absurd to take so much trouble without reaping some reward ; and the reward he coveted was an effect produced by himself—no matter whether it be a stream of tears or a burst of laughter. To obtain a certain effect he would have willingly sacrificed everything—the rights of the defence, and even, at times, those of the prosecution. Thus it was that the magistrates attached to the public prosecution office feared him quite as much as did the barristers defending the accused. If at times he silenced the latter with some bitter taunt, he often disconcerted the former with some cutting sarcasm, especially if he saw that the jury was disposed in the prisoner's favour. At first he always supported the prosecution, but when it appeared likely to fail he abandoned it to its fate, or even precipitated its defeat ; conducting himself after the fashion of those comedians who, when they see their audience badly disposed, do not try to save the piece they are playing, but accentuate its condemnation by making it appear as ridiculous as possible.

This was not the presiding judge's only point of semblance with the members of the theatrical profession. He walked with the strut peculiar to the stage, and bent his arms so as to occupy all the room possible. He also took as much pains as a comedian to monopolize the attention of the spectators. Again, if the prisoner acquired the sympathy of the audience he treated him in the harshest fashion. If the culprit's counsel spoke too eloquently, he neglected the advocate's speech in his summing up, and expatiated on the discourse of the public prosecutor. If, on the other hand, the latter's oration had been the most successful, he preferred to exalt the advocate's talents.

In addition, he had a certain natural nobility of appearance. He was very tall and imposing ; his face was thin and angular ; the sonority of his voice allowed him to be heard in the most spacious courts ; and his mind and manner were, moreover, so supple, that at a moment's notice he could be austere and majestic, humorous or pungent, according to the object he had in view.

IV.

At one moment the procureur-general—the head of the public prosecution office of the department—had thought of coming in person to Condé, to conduct this case which promised to become a *cause célèbre* ; but M. Hairies de la Freslonière, who was not at all anxious to have such a competitor for public attention pitted against himself, skilfully dissuaded the procureur from doing so. Political circumstances, he argued, required that the head of the prosecution office should remain in the capital of the department. If he came to Condé in the midst of the electoral crisis, he might be induced to compromise himself by too marked a support of Count Prétavoine's candidature. This argument apparently had its weight, for the procureur-general eventually decided not to come, and the local public prosecutor, M. Bassaget, was appointed to conduct the case on behalf of the authorities. The presiding judge was particularly satisfied with this result ; which he had indeed skilfully prepared, knowing that he had no rivalry to fear on the part of M. Bassaget.

He was in zinc was this functionary—in zinc from head to foot. Body and clothes alike were in zinc ; his nose was zinc, his collar zinc—not a crease in it, not a bend. He seemed, indeed, as if he had his head fixed in some photographer's or dentist's apparatus. He adopted an attitude when he got up in the morning and he retained it throughout the day. He even preserved it after he had retired to bed, and rose with it again the next morning. His manner was, moreover, so glacial, that a mere glance at him was equivalent to swallowing a bucket of iced water. And yet he was a fluent, indeed, a most rapid orator, speaking without hesitation, without once recalling or correcting a phrase, standing quite motionless as he did so, his arms and body perfectly rigid, his lips and eyelids alone moving. He was, in fact, a perfect word-mill, and it was related that he had purchased a chronometer with a minute dial, so as to ascertain the speed at which he spoke. This speed was terrible, reaching 150 or 160 words a minute ; enough to drive a shorthand writer to despair, if M. Bassaget had ever enjoyed the honour of having his discourses stenographed ; but his glory was as yet deficient in this respect. His remarkable

volubility contrasted most strangely with the rigidity of his appearance and the studied dignity of his walk ; indeed, he did not seem to walk, but rather to transport himself by some fabulous means from one place to another. A magistrate of this description had naturally never pronounced a funny word ; he neither had the time nor the inclination to do so ; he might be harsh or cruel, but he was never witty nor caustic ; hence, one might be sure that he would not hamper the president's efforts ; and, indeed, that he would in all respects content himself with playing second fiddle in the orchestra of the assize court.

While the presiding judge was busy superintending the modifications in the court and sending out his cards of invitation, each one of which was accompanied by a short note impressive of the favour he was granting ; while M. Bassaget was preparing the case for the prosecution, cramming his brain with entire pages of medical encyclopædias, exercising himself in the pronounciation of numerous complicated chemical terms, Mèrault, on his side, was making every exertion to assure the success of the defence.

Vandam, after beginning his task in Paris, had come to finish it at Condé, installing himself in Claude's house ; and every evening, after his daily labour, he might be seen taking a turn on the boulevards. People pointed out to each other the " Paris chemist," who was going to fight little Senelle, and as Vandam was a tall pale fellow with a clumsy walk, neglectful moreover of his personal appearance, he did not inspire the good folks of Condé with any particular confidence. Besides, he was wanting in prestige, and his name, although well-known and esteemed in the Parisian scientific world, had not yet penetrated into the provinces, where people only believe in old time-honoured reputations, such as Orfila and Raspail, great chemists. Mademoiselle Georges, a great tragedian. Horace Vernet, a great painter. The name of Vandam implied nothing at all. When one goes into the provinces one must have the notoriety which age or being puffed into notice imparts. Now, Vandam was only thirty years old, and moreover he was discreet.

As a rule, he was accompanied in his promenades by old Caradon who had taken a liking to him at once—not out of any interest in chemistry, with which the retired medical man was very little acquainted, but because he, Vandam, had come to Condé to give that "stupid ass," Evette, a lesson. Thus it was the whole town knew by Caradon's pantomimic performances

how Claude's affairs were getting on. Whenever Vandam acquainted him with an experiment which belied those of the official experts, Caradon brandished his ivory-handled cane in the air, and gesticulated in the gayest fashion. When, however, on the contrary, Vandam's experiments did not yield the desired result, the old fellow struck the ground with his cane and said all manner of disagreeable things to Vandam, asserting that after all chemistry was of no great importance. "Hippocrates had no laboratory," he would exclaim, "and yet that does not alter the fact that he knew a great deal more than all of you put together."

Whilst Mérault, Vandam, and Caradon were preparing Claude's defence, Nathalie on her side did not remain inactive. If three friends more or less ardently desired Claude's acquittal; for her it was a *sine quâ non*, as if her own life were at stake. And, in reality, was it not her own life, was it not herself, that she had to defend?

The charge brought against Claude had overwhelmed her. She had not foreseen this eventuality in her plan, and directly she received Veronica's letter speaking of the insinuations made against Claude, and of the will drawn up in his favour, she had hastened back to Condé, intending to steal the box in which she had placed the poisonous pill, and to throw the whole of its contents away. She had decided to abandon her design since it threatened to have so different a result from what she had expected. But fate did not allow her to arrive in time. Veronica was dead. Claude was arrested. It was now necessary that she should save him. She needed to do so for his sake and for her own. What would become of her, she asked herself, if he were condemned?

At the moment when the investigating magistrate asked Nathalie if she possessed any information that would prove Claude's innocence, she was on the point of confessing the truth. But if she had done so she would have sacrificed herself, and that implied not merely a degrading punishment, but also Claude's everlasting execration.

So she had not spoken. She could not voluntarily provoke his hatred and contempt. And then, after all, if he were accused, still he was not condemned. She would prevent this monstrous condemnation. She would defend him, she would fight for him; and if he would not owe his fortune to her, at least he would owe her his acquittal, and he could not be otherwise than grateful for her efforts.

First of all and immediately after her return to Paris she had endeavoured to influence the magistrates, M. Bassaget and M. Legrain. Her efforts in this direction having proved unavailing, she applied to the procureur-general, and to the members of the "Chambre des Mises en Accusation." Here again she was unable to obtain any result, and so she waited until the session list of jurymen was published. Directly she became acquainted with the names of the thirty six individuals from among whom Claude's jury would be chosen, she manoeuvred so as to influence them either personally or indirectly. She unhesitatingly adopted any course that seemed likely to serve her interests—no matter however objectionable it might be—in turns utilizing intrigue and hypocrisy, cunning and money. But as it was difficult in so short a time to run after thirty-six jurymen dispersed throughout the department, she was only able to see a few of them before the session opened. Fortunately the minor cases which were set down for hearing prior to Claude's trial brought them all to Condé, and during the few days that were left her she was able to approach them, and no matter what reception they might give her, she managed to say to one and all a few words in Claude's favour.

Besides interviewing the jurymen, Nathalie also spoke to all the journalists—to those of the town as well as to those who came from Paris to report the trial. Jurymen and journalists alike must be influenced in favour of the prisoner—the former in view of the verdict, the latter so as to control public opinion, which it was in their power to direct. It was not merely in Condé that Claude must be acquitted, but all over France, all over Europe indeed.

• V.

THE trial was to commence at ten o'clock in the morning, but at nine the Place du Château was already crowded with people. Those who had no chance of being able to penetrate into the court had come to witness the arrival of their more fortunate fellows, the president's friends, the counsel, the experts, the witnesses, and the journalists. As for the prisoner, there was no possibility of seeing him, for court and prison were alike within the château, and communicated from inside. There were almost as many equipages and as stylish toilettes, as at the annual

race meeting. In fact, the coup d'œil was charming. Every minute the crowd had to make way for the dust-covered vehicle of some great lady of the environs. People pointed out each fresh arrival to one another, and the names of the new comers ran through the crowd. They were all of them notabilities of some kind, for the presiding judge had distributed his invitations among the cream of the local society, so that names and toilettes alike caused a certain sensation. There was, however, but little time to admire the costumes of the ladies, for on alighting from their carriages, they hastened through the grim archway leading into the château, and were speedily lost to view. Every one was naturally anxious to secure his or her seat without loss of time. At a quarter to ten o'clock, the court was already crammed. Not an empty chair, not an empty stool, not a vacant bench or corner could be seen.

On reaching the château, and before donning his robes, the presiding judge set the door leading from the council chamber into the court slightly ajar; and then glancing through this aperture, he had the satisfaction of perceiving that the "house" was ready. It was quite full, still it was not over-crowded. People would be comfortable he felt. There would be no tumult. He would not be interrupted. Every one of his remarks would be heard.

He, indeed, had a thoroughly good house. In the well of the court one might perceive every man having a name or a function in the district, and in the front ranks of the side galleries, every woman noted for her fortune, her position, or her beauty. The latter's toilettes and manners plainly proclaimed who they were, and his lordship really had the right to be proud of his selection. All that he regretted was that he had not warned them that it is scarcely proper to bring opera glasses to a criminal trial. Again it would have, perhaps, been better if some of them had replaced their hats by bonnets, for the latter are more in keeping with *toilettes de cérémonie*. Behind the front ranks came the ordinary public, and here the two sexes were intermingled—crops of hair, bald heads, ribbons and feathers were on all sides perceivable, and in this somewhat sombre court, lighted only on the northern side by three tall windows, these light-coloured feathers and ribbons, these gay toilettes and smiling faces, produced the most agreeable effect.

M. Hairies de la Freslonière had shown himself most obliging to the newspaper reporters, in the hope that they would recog-

nise his merits in their reports of the trial. It was not proper for a man in his position to curry for the favour of these scribblers in an ostensible fashion. His dignity compelled him to keep them at a distance ; still, when the journalists reached their bench, they found a young advocate waiting for them, who placed himself at their disposal, "on M. le President's behalf," with the view of rendering them such little services as they might require, giving them the names of such persons in the audience as were worthy of figuring in their reports ; securing the despatch of their letters and telegrams ; explaining the presiding judge's allusions should they not understand them ; in one word, directing them in the right path, so that on their side they might contribute to the success of the ceremony. Peeping through the opening in the door the presiding judge saw several of the reporters already questioning the young advocate and jotting down his replies, and then, after a last survey of the audience, he softly closed the door and retired. Everything would go on capitally. If by any chance there was a hitch, it would not be his fault, and no one would think of making him responsible.

The moment had now arrived to empannei the jurymen who were to try Claude. Accordingly, M. Hairies de la Freslonière entered his private room and arrayed himself in his red robe, which really gave him a most august appearance. Had it been possible, he would always have worn it ; but unfortunately custom prevented his doing so, for while the soldier and the priest are always arrayed—the former in his uniform, and the latter in his robe—the magistrate has to doff his judicial garments directly he leaves the bench, becoming once more a mere man like any other. This, in the presiding judge's opinion, was a piece of flagrant injustice, which society would do well to remedy. He was several times disturbed while dressing by the court ushers, who brought him cards and letters from people who were behind hand in their applications for seats. They now begged for anything—a stool, standing room—no matter what, so long as they could only obtain admission into court. But stools he had none ; he had given away all he had to dispose of ; as for standing room, the court was already crowded, and he could not compromise the success of the performance by inconveniencing those whom he had invited.

When M. Hairies de la Freslonière entered the council chamber, he found his three assessors, the public prosecutor and the latter's substitute, waiting for him. One of the

assessors asked him the question which for so many days past had re-echoed in his ears. "Have you a place left?"

"Not one. The court is filled to overflowing. It is really shameful to see the unhealthy curiosity which the public exhibits in this affair. If I were to show you the innumerable letters I have received, you would be scandalized on reading the signatures. Instead of assize courts being made larger, they really ought to be made smaller."

The assessor allowed this fit of indignation to pass away. "It's not for one of my friends," he said, when the presiding judge had grown calm again, "it is for the correspondent of a leading English newspaper, who has been particularly recommended to me."

The president assumed a good-natured air. That altered the case. He must not neglect any useful publicity; so, although he had already distributed numerous cards among the representatives of the Parisian, Brussels, London, Cologne, Berlin, and New York press, he did not consider it desirable to offend this tardy English journalist. "For to-day you can give him a seat behind the court," he graciously said, "to-morrow we will try and find him a place beside his colleagues." Then turning towards M. Bassaget, he added:—"Really this Dr. Claude is a lucky fellow. His trial is causing a perfect sensation. It will be as celebrated as Palmer's, as Madame Lafarge's, as Baccarmé's and La Pommeraye's." Undoubtedly Claude *was* a lucky fellow. This was incontestable. In the whole world there were probably few besides himself unwilling to admit the truth of this assertion.

In all French criminal trials there is a preliminary formality which usually escapes public notice, namely, the drawing of the jurymen. They are only selected in open court when the prisoners are too numerous to be summoned into the council-room, or when there is reason to fear any act of violence on the latter's part against either the judges or the jury. Such was not to be feared in Claude's case. At a signal from the presiding judge the door was thrown open, and Claude, escorted by two gendarmes, and followed by Mérault, who wore his advocate's robe, entered the apartment. The gendarmes bade Claude stand against the wall, and then one of them placed himself on his right hand and the other on his left. Claude was dressed in black—a buttoned-up frock coat, and a black cashmere cravat. Two pink spots mantled his cheeks, testifying to the emotion that he felt. At length, after so long and so pain-

ful a captivity, he would at last be able to explain himself, to justify himself, to purify his honour, to avenge his love!

The jurymen, who were escorted by an usher, entered the room in two files. They placed themselves in front of a table round which the judges were seated, and instinctively they looked at Claude, who on his side gazed on them with anxiety. Twelve of these men, chosen by chance, were to decide his fate. What were their ideas he thought? Were they intelligent? Had not their minds already been affected by all the talk that had been going on concerning him for so many months past? Would they be strictly impartial?

These were terrible questions for Claude, and though he had already often asked them of himself in his prison, they had never impressed him as they did now. These men stood before him, and he tried to read in their eyes what they were, what they were thinking of. His efforts were, however, useless. Their eyes, for the most part, only expressed curiosity or embarrassment, for several of them, feeling ill at ease, scarcely dared to look at him—especially those who had known him prior to his arrest. Those who belonged to the middle classes seemed less nervous, but the peasants stood bolt upright in their Sunday clothes, their faces very red, and avoiding both the presiding judge and the prisoner, of whom they seemed equally afraid.

The public prosecutor had now begun to speak, and as the trial promised to be a long one, he asked that in addition to the usual twelve, two supplementary jurymen might be chosen. Then the presiding judge turning to the prisoner informed him that the jury was about to be drawn, and warned him that as the slips of paper bearing the names of the thirty-six jurymen present were drawn out of the urn, he might refuse to be tried by those he objected to. The public prosecutor possessed the same right but should there only remain fourteen names in the urn, further challenges could not take place.

"I have no objections to make," said Claude, "I accept all these gentlemen as my judges."

"That will do," interrupted the presiding judge, who considered Claude's remark a most improper one.

As for the public prosecutor, if he did not reply to the judge's remarks, at all events, he used his right of challenge to the fullest extent. This was very significant for M^réault. He knew very well that all the thirty-six jurymen present were desirous of being empannelled. None of them wished to return home to attend to their business. This trial would be a

cause célèbre, and, indeed, he who acted as a jurymen in the "Affaire Claude," would in after years command respectful attention. The men whom the public prosecutor challenged were those whom he considered might be wanting in firmness—the pusillanimous natures, the idealists who object to the penalty of death on principle—the fools who are frightened of bad dreams and subsequent remorse. Those whom he desired to empanel were, on the contrary, fervent believers in the principle of authority, men who accepted the prosecution as the delegate of justice, who would not allow themselves be led astray by the tittle tattle of the defence, and who would not hesitate to return a verdict in virtue of which capital punishment might be inflicted.

The jury was at length formed; those who had been chosen seemed quite elated; those who had been challenged appeared vexed and humiliated; however, they had one consolation, they would not be called upon again to serve as jurymen for another three years. The operation being over, Claude left the council-chamber, escorted by the gendarmes. A few minutes later, a confused hum reached the apartment where the magistrates still loitered, announcing that the prisoner had just entered the court, and taken his seat in the felon's dock.

VI.

DIRECTLY Claude stepped through the little doorway leading towards the dock, the entire audience rose to its feet, and every eye, every opera-glass, was turned towards him. Startled by this commotion, Claude instinctively hesitated to walk forward, but the gendarmes behind him gave him a slight push, and he then seated himself in the dock. One of the gendarmes now placed himself on his left hand, while two others sat down behind him. He was not alone in the dock with these functionaries of the law. A number of advocates, solicitors, and ushers, had, by a delicate attention of the presiding judge, been relegated to the same spot; indeed, they considered themselves fortunate in having secured admission even to this contaminated enclosure.

The spectators would have liked the prisoner to turn his face towards them, so that they might see if prison life had greatly changed him, but scarcely had he entered the court than he perceived a table intervening between the dock and the bench

—a table covered with a collection of glass jars with large white labels. He did not need to read these labels to know what these jars contained. He instinctively shuddered from head to foot and hid his face with both hands.

"He's ashamed," said some people in the audience.

"He has good reason to be so."

"Still he ought to show more firmness."

"At all events, he ought to show *himself*."

Meanwhile the jurymen had taken their seats in front of the prisoner—being ranged in the order in which their names had been drawn. When they were seated they still had to wait some time for the entrance of the judges. The latter are not at the disposal of the jury, but the jury is rather at the discretion of the bench. M. Hairies de la Freslonière was not the man to lose sight of the fact. He thought it only proper that jury, prisoner, and spectators should have to wait for him. The longer they waited, the more solemn and majestic his entry would be. And so it proved. There were three knocks, similar to the raps which a stage manager gives as a signal to raise the curtain, and then a loud voice exclaimed, "The court! stand up! hats off!" Out of the council-chamber there then stepped the court, or rather the presiding judge whose red robe and dignified mien attracted every glance. He walked slowly, throwing his legs out on either side, stepping on tip toe, his head erect, his *toque* leaning a trifle to the left, but withal, most grave and pompous in his demeanour. He was followed by a boy who carried his portfolio and papers. Slightly bending his head in the direction of the jury, he said, "Gentlemen of the jury, please sit down." Then, addressing himself to the prisoner, he exclaimed, "Prisoner, stand up. Give us your name, your christian names, your age, your profession, your address, and the name of the place where you were born."

Claude answered in a trembling voice. Directly he had ceased speaking the presiding judge, who had hidden his nose in his papers, turned towards Mérault and with a severe glance, and in an almost threatening voice reminded him of clause 311 of the Criminal Investigation Code. Those who were unacquainted with this clause might have thought that the judge was threatening the advocate with some terrible penalty.

"What has the advocate done?" asked a lady whom the presiding judge's tone and manner had frightened.

"Nothing. He is merely invited to speak with decency and moderation."

"And who invites the judge to be moderate?"

"No one."

M. Hairies de la Freslonière had risen from his seat, and with a bare head he administered the oath to the jurymen, who swore to return their verdict conscientiously, with the impartiality and firmness fitting for free and honest men. Then, after calling upon the prisoner to listen attentively to what he was going to hear, he ordered the clerk of the court to read first of all the decree sending the case to be tried at the assizes, and then the act of accusation. The clerk stood up, and speaking through his nose began to read as follows:—

"During the month of May of last year, at the church of St. Etienne in Condé, there was performed a marriage which seemed to unite every condition of happiness—youth, health, and fortune. Among the numerous persons belonging to the highest society who crowded the sacristy with the view of congratulating the young couple, there was not one who for a moment doubted the realization of the good wishes so generally bestowed.

"The bridegroom was Dr. Claude, who in a short time had acquired, thanks to his talents and activity, a most lucrative and extensive practice.

"The bride was a charming girl, Mademoiselle Veronica Lerissel, who counted as her friends all those who had ever approached her. Indeed, every one who knew her, and these persons are numerous, was struck as much with the qualities of her mind and heart as with the graces of her person. They all testify to her good nature, and she has been unanimously proclaimed a tender, affectionate, devoted, confiding, generous woman.

"One thing, however, was wanting in this marriage. Love—reciprocal love—not love of the wife for her husband, for this was complete, excessive, but love of the husband for the wife. Effectively, in spite of his wife's qualities, in spite of her beauty, Claude did not love her. He, a bachelor, had not been attracted by this charming girl. If his friends had not intervened, if they had not brought pressure to bear upon him, the marriage would probably never have taken place; but they were able to bring forward a decisive argument—pecuniary interest. Whilst Mademoiselle Lerissel found herself, owing to her father's premature death, the possessor of a fortune of more than 400,000 francs, Claude, on the other hand, possessed nothing; indeed, less than nothing. His debts were his sole belongings.

"His father was a modest chemist of Hannebault, who did not

succeed in his business, but whose ruin left his honour intact. Claude was originally brought up as his father's eventual successor ; but, unfortunately, this honourable if modest position did not suffice for his ambitious ideas. He disdained to become a chemist, he wished to be a physician in Paris. His success at school increased his pride, and he dreamt of a high and brilliant destiny. Already in early youth he expressed contempt for provincial life and set out for Paris, where he hoped to be able to satisfy his ambition and his cupidity, where, moreover, he hoped to enjoy those pleasures and taste those joys which are the privilege of opulence and glory. But his hopes are not realised ; after a few years' struggle he finds that his legs are not strong enough to scale the glorious summit of which he had caught a glimpse. Despite all his efforts, he has remained in a very indifferent position, in fact in a miserable position, only living by ruinous expedients, by scarcely honourable work, or by means of money borrowed from his friends. His distress is so great that he dines every day off a penny roll which he himself buys at the baker's, and yet as he is desirous of dazzling and courting attention, he inhabits a sumptuously furnished apartment and lunches every morning in a fashionable restaurant, where he ostentatiously, and for the mere pleasure of vanity, squanders enough money to live, were he only content to lead a quiet life. It is in the midst of this undignified existence that the post of surgeon becomes vacant at the Condé hospital. One of his old college friends, acquainted with his distress, goes to see him, speaks to him the language of honour and duty, shows him where the path he has adopted will lead him if he does not abandon it at once, and eventually persuades him to compete for the post vacant at Condé. He does so ; he obtains the appointment ; he comes to reside at Condé. But the lessons of experience have been unavailing. Nothing can cure his passion for ostentation and luxury, and he installs himself at Condé just as he had installed himself at Paris. His carpets, his costly furniture, his works of art, his curiosities which he transports from the capital at great expense, cause a perfect sensation in a town where, until then, luxury had fortunately remained the privilege of opulence. In spite, however, of this unworthy means of attracting public attention, and thanks to a fortunate combination of circumstances, as well as to his skill and knowledge which are incontestable, Claude soon succeeds in acquiring a capital practice. This skill and knowledge of his attract patients to his house, although he had by

his haughty despotic character, by his want of courtesy for his colleagues, and by his anti-religious ideas wounded the most respectable sentiments of every party in the town. Still, as merit is not lost sight of, his practice steadily increases, and, if as a man he enjoys but little esteem, as a doctor he is greatly sought after.

"Then it is that honourable persons who know him, think of marrying him and speak to him concerning Mademoiselle Lerissel. A young girl possessed of every quality, with a portion of 400,000 francs—was that not a splendid marriage for a man who had not yet paid off all his debts? And yet he declines to hear of it. Why? The young lady, whose name is suggested, does not please him; he feels no sympathy for her. He does not desire to marry. His friends repeatedly speak to him on the subject, but he always gives them the same reply.

"One day, however, he is told that this young lady is threatened with heart disease. At all events, a doctor who had seen her believed such to be the case. We will at once add that he was in error, but on this point Claude was not yet enlightened. His sentiments of repulsion are at once transformed into sentiments of sympathy. He did not care for the 400,000 francs if their possession implied a long married life with Mademoiselle Lerissel, but if he can secure possession of this money without the expense of a wife, matters would be greatly changed. The heart disease which his friends speak of shows him that such a calculation is quite possible. Heart disease usually causes an early death. Thus, his wife will die soon after their marriage, and the money will belong to him alone. With these 400,000 francs he will be able to resume his ambitious designs; he will then possess the capital which had failed him until now.

"He therefore listens to the overtures which he had hitherto spurned. An interview is arranged between him and Mademoiselle Lerissel, for before everything he desires to know the extent of the disease of which he has only vaguely heard. He examines Mademoiselle Lerissel, and with that skill one cannot deny him, he at once perceives that this disease does not exist, indeed that it has never existed. This discovery should have led him to abandon his matrimonial designs, since there was now no probability of his wife dying at an early age; but he has been indulging in dreams of fortune, he sees these 400,000 francs already within his grasp. Shall he relinquish them? No: he will not! He will not renounce his criminal ambitious designs. If this unfortunate young girl has no disease of the heart mat-

rally, well he will give her one by scientific means. She shall not die because God has condemned her to death, but because he, her husband, has done so—he, a doctor, who, while knowing how to cure, also knows how to kill. She shall die poisoned in such a manner that her death will be explained by this pretended disease of the heart. The 400,000 francs will then be his, and he will have got rid of his wife.”

On reaching this point the clerk paused, for he was quite out of breath. Then the spectators began to look at each other and the cream of society exchanged opinions.

“Is that how it happened?”

“Yes, certainly, Dr Claude belongs to that category of men who only care to marry sickly wives in hopes of inheriting their fortunes at once. Being a doctor he was admirably circumstanced to carry out his design.”

The clerk now began to read again—

“Scarcely had this fatal design entered his brain, than he commenced putting it into execution. Mademoiselle Lerissel was living with her cousin, Madame Gillet, in a house belonging to the latter. This house, situated on the Boulevard du Château, is vast, composed of numerous apartments and affords accommodation for a large number of persons, without these latter being in the least degree crowded together. Indeed, several families might live in it separate one from another. Now, Mademoiselle Lerissel wished to continue living after her marriage with her cousin Madame Gillet; and the latter would have greatly liked to remain in a house she was so accustomed to, and with a relative for whom she felt so much affection. The size of the house would have made such an arrangement extremely feasible. But then such a state of things is at variance with Claude’s plans. He does not desire to have an inconvenient witness at his elbow; he needs solitude and mystery. He accordingly refuses his betrothed bride the very first request she makes to him, and so great is his desire to shroud his designs in this solitude and mystery, of which mention has been made, that he buys Madame Gillet’s house; indeed, buys it for more than it is actually worth. He then proceeds to shut himself up in this house—alone with his wife, alone with his victim. Driven from her home, Madame Gillet is unable to watch over them: Claude need fear no surprise.

“But Mademoiselle Lerissel has another relative to whom she is also greatly attached, a very honourable and much-esteemed unmarried lady, a person of great merit, full of experience, and

worthy by her virtues to act as a young woman's guide and mentor."

These last words, being emphasized by the clerk, provoked a murmur of approbation among the spectators, and all eyes were at once turned towards Cousin Quite-Well? who was seated in the front rank of the witnesses, and who received this spontaneous homage in the most dignified style.

"But," continued the clerk, "Claude had determined that his wife should have no guide. He provokes a quarrel with this venerable lady so as to drive her from the house. This is not merely a precaution on his part, but also an act of vengeance, for Mademoiselle Pélagie Lerissel—having seemingly received a providential warning of which the saintly character of her life rendered her well worthy—had already prevented her young cousin from converting her marriage contract into a deed of gift.

"Alone with his young wife, Claude is able to carry his execrable design into execution. Before all he must win his bride's confidence and love, so as to extort from her a will in his favour. He displays his so called tenderness in public, in too ostensible a manner for it to be sincere—he takes his wife about with him wherever he goes: he acts the comedy of love; he prepares witnesses for the day when he will have to prove that he was a good husband; he plays a double game, for at the same time he has to deceive the public, he must also deceive his wife so as to lead her to make her will by a natural chain of circumstances.

"This latter task is somewhat difficult; for it is not at twenty years of age, it is not when a young woman is full of health, at a moment when she is expecting to become a mother, joyfully and actively preparing her first born's layette, it is not at such a moment that a young wife thinks of making her will. Such an idea would only come to her if she were ill—therefore says Claude, she must be made ill. She must become ill for the sake of the will he covets. She must become ill so that when her death occurs it will be apparently explicable. She must become ill so that he may administer to her as remedies, substances which shall poison her, and which he hopes will baffle justice.

"So, thanks to his skill and cunning, she becomes ill; and her symptoms are apparently those of heart disease. However, he takes great care not to be present at the attack he has provoked. He knows his wife, he knows that she will not send for another

doctor in his absence ; she will be ill, in danger of death, that will suffice for his plan, no one competent to detect the true character of this sudden illness, will see her ; and so when people speak to him, a doctor, concerning this illness he is able to reply that it is inexplicable. A fortnight afterwards a fresh attack occurs with precisely the same symptoms. On this occasion he is present and as he feels that he cannot assume the responsibility of prescribing for an illness which in his eyes is inexplicable, he decides when the most violent phases of the attack have taken place, to send for two of his colleagues.

“ Misled by what they are told, these honourable medical practitioners do not dare to suspect that the patient has been poisoned. Dr. Graux considers that she is suffering from an angina ; as for Dr. Marsin, he can only formulate a series of conjectures. They are, both of them, honest men, and it is a horrible idea for them to think of suspecting a fellow-physician. Besides, how is it possible to imagine that any one would entertain the design of poisoning so charming a woman as this unfortunate Madame Claude ?

“ But Claude does not consider it sufficient to deceive his two colleagues. He requires something more. Before proceeding any further, he desires to make sure that the poison he has administered to his wife will not be detected. With this object in view, he forwards to one of his friends, a Parisian chemist, a part of the matter which his victim has vomited ; whilst with the remainder he makes a number of physiological experiments on animals. The chemist soon answers him that the matters he has analysed do not contain any toxical mineral substance, and he does not believe that they contain any organic poison ; indeed, he asserts they do not so far as chemical science can to-day determine.

“ Finally, Claude requires that some great physician, one of the uncontested authorities of the medical world, should examine his wife with the view of establishing the fact that she is affected with a disease of the heart. Accordingly, he takes his wife to Paris to see one of his old masters, Professor Carbonneau, and the latter, who can only base his diagnosis on the symptoms which are signalled to him, declares that Madame Claude is threatened with a disease of the heart, which is, he declares with prudent reserve, as yet only imperfectly defined. This statement will, however, suffice for Claude to complete his task directly he has wrung from his wife the will which she has not yet signed.

“ Whilst Claude is thus taking every precaution to assume, as

he thinks, his own impunity, those who know his wife, and are acquainted with the excellent health she has hitherto enjoyed, are surprised at hearing of the violent attacks with which she is now afflicted—attacks which cannot be explained, and which take place under the most extraordinary, almost supernatural, circumstances. After surprise, comes alarm ; and after alarm, suspicion. She is being poisoned ; slowly, skilfully poisoned. Who raises this cry ? Everybody in the town. *Vox populi, vox Dei.*

“ However, it is impossible to allow her to die without making an effort to save her. Then it is that her venerable relative, Mademoiselle Pélagie Lerissel, makes a supreme attempt. ‘ Never make your will,’ says she to Madame Claude ; ‘ for the day that your will is made you will be poisoned to death.’ This warning, which might have saved her, unfortunately hastens her death. When Claude comes home, his young wife, who never hides anything from him, acquaints him with the visit she has received, with what she has been told, with the advice that has been given her.

“ If Claude had not been confident in his science he might have hesitated, but he is so fervent a believer in his own skill that he never hesitates. He knows that there are poisons which chemistry is powerless to detect, he has experimented with them, or, rather, his friend the Paris chemist, Vandam, in whom he had full confidence, has experimented for him. Thus it is that he had the diabolical skill to convert the step which was intended for his wife’s salvation into a means of obtaining the will he covets. ‘ I am accused of wishing to poison you, so as to inherit your fortune,’ he says to his wife. ‘ Now make a will in my favour ; tell every one that you have done so ; and when people see you are alive, the accusation will be scattered to the winds.’ The unfortunate young woman, who has full faith in the man she loves, acts as she is bid. On the 20th April she makes her will at her husband’s dictation, appointing him her universal legatee ; and on the 24th she expires, after several hours of frightful suffering ; the symptoms being the same as those she had already undergone—viz., nausea, vomiting, weakness, somnolence, and muscular contractions. It was impossible for the law not to intervene ; her death taking place under these circumstances. Public opinion alone sufficed to impose this duty upon the legal functionaries of the town.”

The act of accusation next dealt with the skilful investigations of the judicial authorities, and then with the task allotted to

the experts. It showed that the necropsy had revealed nothing corroborating Claude's theory as to his wife's death; and ultimately described the chemical analysis and the physiological experiments—these being detailed at great length, and with a wonderful display of scientific terms, showing that the compiler of the act had borrowed largely from the experts' reports.

"These reports," continued the act of accusation, "conclude with this formal declaration:—'Madame Claude was poisoned to death. Neither in her heart, her stomach, nor her brain, in no organ whatsoever did the experts detect a natural cause which might have occasioned this young woman's death. Indeed, there is only one cause—an extraneous one—that could have occasioned it—namely, poison. And the experts find the proof of this poisoning in the nature of the vomited matter, and in the state of the victim's organs, portions of which, administered after chemical treatment to various animals, have occasioned their death, with symptoms precisely similar to those which were observed by Drs. Graux and Marsin during Madame Claude's two last attacks.

"As for the poisonous substance employed, the experts have been unable to isolate it but they believe it to be a poison of the heart, causing death by paralysing that organ—one of these mysterious poisons which as Claude's friend Vandam writes to him, 'cannot be detected by chemistry in the present state of science.' The nature of this poison is indeed the strongest charge against Claude; and thus one can say with certainty that Dr. Claude was the poisoner, precisely because no traces of the poison can be found. The skill with which it was administered, betrays the hand which poured it out.

"Consequently, Etienne Claude is accused:—Of having, in year 1877, at Condé le Châtel, and with the assistance of a the poisonous substance capable of inflicting death, murdered his wife, Veronica Claude, *née* Lerissel, which crime is foreseen by clauses 301 and 302 of the Penal Code."

VII.

HAVING finished the reading of this document the clerk sat down and at once a vague hum spread through the court. Spectators of every rank began to exchange opinions concerning the statements they had just heard.

While the names of the witnesses were being called over, numerous criticisms were indulged in. The prisoner's attitude was considered most improper. Instead of listening attentively to the indictment, he had remained with his head buried in his hands. No doubt he was ashamed to find himself in the dock, still, as he was there, he ought to look circumstances in the face.

The barristers present remarked that this act of accusation was in reality a piece of special pleading, entirely directed against the prisoner, instead of being, as it should have been, a simple impartial statement of facts, setting forth the prisoner's defence as well as the charges brought against him.

Although the witnesses had retired, the presiding judge still remained, leaning over his papers which he was apparently studying, though in reality he retained this attitude so as not to have to struggle against the general buzz of conversation, and also to allow public attention to be turned naturally towards him. When he felt that all eyes were fixed upon the bench and that every one was waiting for him to speak, he slowly raised his head. An over zealous usher thought this was the right moment to shout "silence!" whereat the president made a grimace; he did not require any officious interference. He waited a minute longer, employing his time in making some remark to the assessor, seated on his right hand, who was ostensibly engaged in cutting the pages of the last number of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, a task which he had reserved for this particular occasion, being desirous of showing the public that he was a man of literary tastes.

At length, silence and attention being complete, the presiding judge turned towards Claude.

"Prisoner stand up," he said, "you were born at Hannebault and you belong, we willingly admit it, to an honourable family. However, your father had no fortune, I believe?" The presiding judge paused for a moment, but Claude did not reply.

"I ask you," repeated M. Hairies de la Freslonière, "if your father had any fortune."

Claude made an evident effort to speak, and ultimately said: "He had none."

"He was short of money, in debt?" Claude remained silent.

"I am questioning you, it is your duty to answer me." Claude had turned himself so as to face the bench.

"Address yourself to the gentlemen of the jury," said the presiding judge, "and answer," Claude seemingly hesitated to do so. It was evident that he was labouring under some

violent emotion; those who were in front of him could perceive that his eyes were darting hither and thither with strange mobility. His manner was alike significant of embarrassment, pain, uneasiness.

What was the matter with him? was he ill? This idea pro-pounded simultaneously by several persons who were observing him, caused a momentary alarm. What! Had they disarranged themselves for nothing? He must make an effort to defend himself. If he defended himself badly so much the worse for him. Why should he drag people away from their business or their pleasure, simply for the purpose of sending them home again? People had come to hear him; it was therefore his duty to speak. People had moreover come to look at him and so he must turn himself towards the jury-box, and especially towards the public. If he were unwell, why had he not prescribed for himself? He had known for some time past that his affair was set down for the 4th.

Fortunately all these apprehensions were soon dispelled. "Monsieur le Président" exclaimed Claude, vehemently, "it is impossible for me to defend myself under the conditions in which I am placed. I cannot follow your questions—I cannot answer you—My mind is not free."

"What do you mean?"

With a gesture more eloquent than words Claude pointed to the glass jars set out on the table before him. Then he again hid his head with his two hands.

"We must not have any sentimentality here," said the presiding judge.

Before Claude could speak again, Mérault swiftly rose from his seat, and with his *togue* in his hand, exclaimed—"I ask the permission of M. le Président, with all the deference I owe him, to allow me to observe that at the same time it is not advisable to display any unnecessary harshness—"

"Maitre Mérault?"

"It is not merely in my client's name that I am speaking," continued the advocate, "but also in my own. I was the friend of the unfortunate woman whose remains are exhibited on that table, and I declare that the view of those vases affects my mind. The affair which gathers us together into this hall is sufficiently painful in itself without it being necessary to provoke the emotion of the gentlemen of the jury by this melodramatic exhibition. I therefore ask M. le Président to have these vases removed, and only to place them again on that

table if it be absolutely necessary. In making this request I appeal to his feelings of humanity."

The presiding judge had bent his brows; these last words however softened the frown upon his forehead. He could not refuse an appeal made to his feelings of humanity. He might not have granted such a request if the prisoner alone had spoken; but he was also asked to oblige the counsel for the defence. Besides it would be skilful to make a show of good nature at the outset of the trial. "Shall I also give orders to remove the layette at which this unfortunate young woman was working when death surprised her?" he asked.

"I should feel grateful if you would do so, Monsieur le Président."

The sitting was interrupted for a few minutes. At length, when the last jar had been removed and silence was re-established, the presiding judge was able to resume his interrogatory. "I hope that emotion will not now prevent you from listening to me," he said. "I asked you if your father were not in debt, and if at the epoch of your childhood you had not already felt affected by the spectacle of his pecuniary embarrassments?"

"That is true. I had a great affection for my father and I grieved very much that so generous, so intelligent a man should be perpetually struggling with the difficulties of life."

"Since infancy, therefore, you were frightened and horrified at the prospect of poverty. In spite of his straightened circumstances your father gave you a liberal education. He placed you in the college of the town, where you were a good pupil, intelligent, active, mindful of your work, ambitious moreover, indeed even too ambitious, having a pride and vanity that are not common to childhood. You were willing to undergo everything so long as you remained at the head of your class."

"I was indeed fond of work; it was a pleasure for me to learn; and, on the other hand, I was desirous of showing my father in an effective manner that I was grateful to him for the sacrifices he was making for my education."

"Did you not make yourself ill one day in an effort not to lose the first place in the class?"

"I don't recollect."

"I will speak more precisely. One day you cut your foot by jumping on some broken bottles; you were taken home to your father but you wouldn't remain with him. You preferred to return to college for your examination. Your wound became inflamed and you were seriously ill."

"On, the matter had so little importance that I did not think it was of that you were speaking."

"On the contrary, the matter has a serious importance for the gentlemen of the jury, since it shows how great was your ambition when you were only thirteen years of age. You have admitted that you suffered at the sight of your father's straightened circumstances. This last fact shows you were ambitious. That was all that I wished to indicate in order that the jury might perceive that the two traits in your character to which your wife's death is attributed—love of money and ambition—dated from your childhood. We shall see how they increased later on, and if they led you to commit the horrible cowardly crime with which you are charged. You suffered for want of money, you were ambitious, those facts are proved."

In the silence of his cell Claude had often thought over this interrogatory, he had asked himself what questions would be addressed to him, and what would be his answers, and he fancied that he had examined all those matters which could possibly be dealt with in open court. Yet he had never imagined that his sympathy for his father's sufferings and his love of work would be attributed to criminal motives. If the presiding judge continued in this strain what would he not arrive at, and of what would he, Claude, not be found guilty? At this thought, he felt a vague dread creep over him, and yet it was necessary to remain calm and firm, fully master of himself, for he must defend his innocence and triumph.

The presiding judge did not leave him time for further reflection. "Your father," he said, "had you educated in this manner in the hope that you would one day succeed him; and in his situation, as he had no capital to leave you, this design was both wise and prudent; he would be able to leave you his shop and practice, he would also leave you his good name, and your life would then be an easy one. Why would you not be a chemist?"

"Because my vocation was elsewhere—in the medical profession."

"Vocation is a very big word; however, I will not discuss the point; still, I must ask you if your vocation was not wealth rather?"

"The medical profession does not imply wealth."

"What does it imply then?"

"Devotion."

"Then why didn't you tell us at once that your vocation was devotion. If you have witnesses ready to state that you

have been a St. Vincent de Paul, name them; they shall be heard; and their evidence may be opposed to that of the witnesses for the prosecution, who will swear in your presence that you are a poisoner, but I pass that by. You do not desire to be a chemist, you desire to be a doctor; not at Hannebault, where you might also have found room for your devotion, but in Paris, where opportunities are more numerous. In Paris, as devotion is only practised in the wealthy districts, you rent an apartment in an aristocratic quarter, the Rue des Saints Pères. There indeed you take a spacious apartment and furnish it sumptuously."

"I did not at first reside in the Rue des Saints Pères, but in the Rue de Savoie, which is in a poor district; I only came to live in the Rue des Saints Pères when one of my friends, whose health obliged him to leave Paris, generously offered me his apartment, saying that if I could pay my rent on quarter day all well and good, if not, he would pay it himself, and later on I could refund him whatever he had advanced for me."

"So you began with debts? In spite of your intelligence, your activity, your eagerness to acquire a fortune—I make a mistake, I mean, your eagerness to devote yourself—you had not succeeded in creating a practice. Indeed, your distress becomes so great, that you are reduced to dine every day off a penny roll. Is it true that you dined off this penny roll?"

"It is true, but—"

"Don't discuss my questions, answer them. You were therefore in misery when you came to reside at Condé; what made you leave Paris for Condé. Your vocation? Devotion?"

"It was the necessity of promptly earning money so as to pay off my father's debts, but it was not without pain that I renounced the life I had dreamt of."

"A life of ambition?"

"No, a life of work and study." •

"The jury will remember that you have admitted you only abandoned your dreams with regret."

Neither the presiding judge nor Claude was satisfied with the turn the interrogatory was taking. No doubt the prisoner's mention of his vocation had furnished the presiding judge with the pretext for some witty raillery, at least so the latter considered, but, on the other hand, it had led him to diverge from the line he had previously traced for himself, and the jurymen might be after a different scent to the one he wished them to follow. On his side, Claude considered that it would be very

difficult for him to prove that he was not an avaricious and ambitious man as the prosecution pretended, and he felt worried that the jury should be left under this first impression, for it would lead them to believe in any other accusations developed later on. The president's attitude plainly indicated the object he had in view.

Having shown that the prisoner lived in horror of poverty, that he was animated with a love of luxury, and that he was devoured with ambition, the presiding judge next proceeded to retrace Claude's life at Condé, recalling the incident of Trempu's broken leg, the quarrel with the hospital sisters whom he termed "those saintly daughters of the Lord," the circumstances under which Lerondel died intestate, and finally Claude's attitude at the trial of the brothers Vilaine. The president was extremely diffuse in his narrative, jumbling one incident up with another, and artfully contriving to transform Claude's simplest acts into crimes, so that the jury might imagine that he was a perfect monster of iniquity. Whenever Claude attempted a detailed explanation he was cut short by this domineering ornament of the bench.

"Allow me," observed M. Hairies de la Freslonière. "All that is matter for discussion. You don't answer me, you plead your case. This is not the time to plead but to answer. Besides you will do better to allow your advocate to plead for you. We are sure that he will acquit himself of that task with as much eloquence as moderation. In your own interest, prisoner, you will do well to husband your strength, you will require it by-and-by. The law invests me with the duty of suppressing anything that might uselessly prolong the trial, and I must see that the gentlemen of the jury are not retained during too long a period. As it is, your trial will be a long one; it would never end if I allowed you to digress as you seemingly desire to do. You had much better be brief."

Each time that Claude, having received a lecture of this description, thought fit to hold his tongue, being unable to answer the president's questions with a mere "yes" or "no," M. Hairies de la Freslonière exclaimed:—"I call attention to the fact that you do not answer. The gentlemen of the jury will know how to appreciate your silence."

"But, Monsieur le Président—"

"You wish to speak? Well, speak. I grant you all liberty to do so, all that I have to recommend you is not to expatiate on a number of useless details. Well, we are here to listen to

you. Now, what have you got to say." With these words the presiding judge threw himself back in his arm-chair, adopting an attitude of patience and resignation, as if to impress the audience with his good nature and magnanimity. He was not the man to tamper with the rights of the defence, oh dear no! Only, really he could not be expected to accept as gospel truth, a lot of words the falsity of which he guessed beforehand, and to which the jury could not possibly pay any serious attention. As he feared that his numerous digressions might have thrown the jury off the scent he desired them to follow, he thought it best to resume the interrogatory so far as it had gone, and to indicate its salient points. He insisted on the fact that the prisoner had been especially guided by pecuniary considerations throughout his life.

"Yes," he exclaimed, turning towards Claude, "yes, you have been a man of money, not a man of sentiment. There is nothing in love that is calculated to please you or to influence you. And this fact should be noted, for it explains why you did not love your wife."

At these words, Claude was unable to restrain his indignation. "I protest with all my strength against such an accusation," he cried. "I loved, I adored my wife."

"After the revelations of the inquiry, it is astonishing that you should dare to speak in that manner."

"But, am I not here to deny and disprove the lie—the erroneous statements of that enquiry?"

"Prisoner, in your own interest, I advise you to be moderate. You need facts, not violent language, to disprove the statements in question."

"Undoubtedly; but the facts, the witnesses, all alike testify to my affection for my wife."

"We will examine the facts by-and-by."

"Then, would it not be only just to wait for that examination before expressing an opinion?"

The presiding judge did not think fit to answer this retort, but he observed. "We shall also hear the witnesses by-and-by, and we shall then see if the prosecution was wrong in pretending that you skilfully prepared the evidence which you invoke to-day, with the view of utilizing it when necessary."

On being asked why he at first so persistently refused the hand of Mademoiselle Lerissel, "that charming girl dowered with wealth and beauty," Claude answered that the modesty of his position had not allowed him at first to dream of so rich

a marriage, as he would assuredly have done had he been the mercenary creature the prosecution pretended.

"But," retorted the presiding judge, "the prosecution maintains that it is precisely your refusal to marry which shows what an avaricious man you are. At all events, it is certain that you did not display any sentiments of tenderness or sympathy for this young girl, until you learnt that she was afflicted with a disease of the heart. If such be the case, your love for your wife, like your vocation for medical science, may have been the outcome of your sentiments of devotion."

A part of the audience considering this remark a witty one, thought fit to laugh at it. As for Claude, he disdained to answer. Turning towards the spectators he gazed at them contemptuously. Was it not enough for him to have to defend himself against this hostile judge, who took such pleasure in deriding him?

The question as to whether Veronica had been subject to heart disease or not, was next examined by the judge; and then he dealt with the purchase of Madame Gillet's house, and the marriage contract. On these points Claude defended himself better than when questioned concerning his first refusals to marry Mademoiselle Lerissel. The reader is acquainted with the reasons which kept his tongue tied; but the spectators were not, and they were consequently all of opinion that his marriage had not been a love match, but rather a marriage of interest, which pecuniary considerations had led him to contract.

The presiding judge noted this impression, which was evident, not merely among the spectators, but also among the jurymen. This then was the weak point that required to be insisted on. "So," said he, "you married, without affection, a woman whom, according to the prosecution, you had condemned to death, so as to get hold of her money. If that be true, if you had already formed the execrable design of poisoning her, you were, at the same time, too intelligent not to understand that your indifference for your charming wife would one day be employed as an argument against you accordingly. After that idea has entered your head you are seen to exhibit an apparently lively passion for your wife. You leave her alone as little as possible, you take her with you in your carriage whenever you go into the country. At night-time you go out walking with her in the woods. Indeed, you do not seem to treat her as your wife, but rather as if she were some woman with whom you had formed a passing *liaison*.

"I deny that assertion ; but still what you yourself say would prove that I have in my heart a little of the tenderness which you stated I did not possess."

"Oh it is quite possible that it was not all acting. Your wife was young and beautiful."

"Then you yourself admit that I *did* love her ?"

"Prisoner, you must not bandy words with the court. We will not allow you to do so, despite the forbearance which we desire to show to a man in your position."

"I am in this dock to defend myself, to defend my honour, my life, my love which is dearer to me than my life. I defend it as best I can, and when an occasion presents itself for me to affirm that love, I profit of it to say to you with all my strength, to say to all of you, you who judge me or you who listen to me : 'Cannot you see that I loved her, that I weep for her loss !' " Saying these words Claude turned towards the jury, then towards the spectators, and displayed to every one his contracted features down which the tears were streaming. The effect was so unexpected, it was so dramatic, that every one started with emotion or surprise.

"The sitting is suspended," hastily said the presiding judge. "Gendarmes, remove the prisoner."

The entire "house" had risen to its feet, and every one began to discuss the incident in a loud voice. An eloquent gesture, a passionate cry, had done more in Claude's favour, than the best reasons or the strongest logic. He was a man, not a monster after all. Still, Claude had by no means won all the public over to his side. This cry, this gesture had not disarmed his enemies, so many of whom were in court. On the contrary, they were exasperated with this outburst. "The rascal ! How skilful he was in defending himself. How cleverly he managed to turn things to his own advantage." Then there were the sceptical spectators who complained that Claude's proceeding was not in good taste. "It was too 'professional.' A gentleman does not speak in that manner. He does not cry out, or wave his arms about. This Dr. Claude evidently did not know how to conduct himself in society ; but, after all, was he not a mere chemist's son ?"

While these remarks were being exchanged, many spectators were engaged in taking refreshments, and great was the consumption of cakes and chocolate, sweetmeats and fruit, which people had provided themselves with.

There were some gentlemen, amateur turfites, who offered to

bet on the result of the trial. "Five to one that he's condemned!" said one.

"Condemned to what?"

"Ten louis to fifty!"

"Even on death."

On the reporters' bench, the president's manner and the prisoner's attitude were discussed in preference to the incidents of the trial. "Wasn't the president funny in what he said about medical devotion!" exclaimed the young advocate, whom M. Hairies de la Freslonière had delegated to attend on the reporters.

"Your judge isn't a judge," answered an English journalist, "He's a prosecutor."

"That doesn't prevent his being very witty."

"It would be better if he had less wit, and more impartiality."

Another advocate approached the reporters' bench—"Don't let yourselves be got at by young Clavel," he said, in an undertone. "He's the president's dog of all work—M. Hairies is frightfully lazy, and gives Clavel all his briefs to epitomize, and in return appoints him counsel for the defence whenever a prisoner hasn't an advocate."

"Claude is defending himself badly," exclaimed a grey-headed reporter, who had passed his life in recording judicial proceedings. "He has a violent nature. He is wearing himself out in efforts not to explode—He'll soon be exhausted—Then the presiding judge will do what he likes with him. You should tell your colleague Mérault to warn Claude only to reply on the main points. The president's tactics are evident. He wants to exasperate and tire his prisoner. At all events, let Claude ask to remain seated. The sitting won't be long suspended, you'll see. The judge won't allow him time to get calm."

Effectively the interlude was a short one—Claude was soon brought back into court again, and he was in as excited a state as when he had left it. Directly the judge and the jurymen returned, silence was re-established without the assistance of the ushers. Every one understood that the decisive moment had now arrived, and that all they had heard, had merely been so much preliminary matter.

The presiding judge's first words indicated the line he now intended to follow. "A charming young woman," he said, "a model of every grace and virtue, in one word, your wife was poisoned on the 24th of April—Public clamour designates you as the poisoner, you assert that you are innocent."

"Yes."

"Then how do you explain this sudden death?"

"I don't explain it," said Claude, "though I deny that she was poisoned." Then raising his voice, he added, "when you speak of poisoning, you admit a fact which is precisely under discussion, Monsieur le Président—I am not condemned, I am accused."

The presiding judge shrugged his shoulders, with a smile that plainly implied that the distinction was a very futile one. "I admit nothing," he said, "I expose the charges made against you in accordance with the law, which invest me with the duty of doing all I can to arrive at the truth; and on this point allow me to say, that by arguing as you do, instead of assisting me in my difficult task, you occasion serious trouble. No doubt you have a right to defend yourself as you may think fit; but believe me the system you have adopted is a bad one."

The presiding judge spoke in a tone of good-natured compassion. He was evidently convinced that if there was any victim in the affair it was himself. He did not however complain that it should be so, and if he mentioned the matter, it was merely in the prisoner's interest. He then narrated at great length the incidents which occurred during the earlier months of Claude's married life, dealing with Veronica's attacks, Graux and Marsin's visits, Vandam's experiments, Carbonneau's examination, and the digitalis treatment. At length he spoke of Cousin Quite-Well's denunciation, and remarked that forgetting her just resentment, this venerable lady only re-entered the house from which she had been banished, with the view of saving her young relative's life. "Thus," observed the judge, "it is essential to remember this point—that Mademoiselle Lerissel's visit took place on the 20th, and that your wife died on the 24th. Directly this unfortunate woman had signed her will, she died—Now that fact is alone an overwhelming accusation against you."

"No it is not, for I should have been mad not to have understood that those two dates would constitute an overwhelming charge, as you say."

"Answer, but don't plead."

"I cannot allow that accusation to pass unchallenged."

"Then make haste."

"In two words, I desire to call the attention of the gentlemen of the jury—"

"The jury don't need you to call their attention to anything."

Your loquacity is calculated to tire them, but you cannot say that they are inattentive."

"I desire to state that a man in my position, acquainted with the charges circulating through the town, would not have killed his wife the day after he had obtained from her a will in his favour ; it would have been madness to have acted so."

"The madness was in the conception of so abominable a crime, in the hope that it would remain unpunished. When the execution of the crime has commenced, when the will has been signed, it is not an act of madness to kill the person who might revoke it. It is an act of prudence and audacity, for if this unfortunate creature had allowed this will to be wrung from her—how ? we do not know, but her love would probably explain her weakness ; if she has written this will at your dictation—don't interrupt me, I am quoting the words of the prosecution—if she has done all this, still might she not change her mind, and if a little time be granted her, revoke a will which is her death warrant ? Therefore she must die before she *can* revoke it, and accordingly, what you call madness, the prosecution terms diabolical skill. Now, if you have anything to say to the gentlemen of the jury, speak, we will listen to you."

"It was she, not I who suggested the making of this will."

"That is a simple allegation, based on nothing tangible ; she who might have been your witness is dead. You will understand that the jury cannot content themselves with your denials, any more than they can content themselves with your assertions. You must prove what you state. Moreover it must be noted that when you are questioned on an unimportant incident you find plenty of words to explain it, but when the matter is an overwhelming one like the present, you remain silent. The gentlemen of the jury will appreciate that singularity. I continue."

The presiding judge then proceeded to retrace the incidents which occurred on the day Veronica died—the walk in the woods of La Rouvraye, the parting of husband and wife at the outskirts of the town—a characteristic precaution in the eyes of the prosecution ; Veronica's return home ; the attack she experienced ; the symptoms of this attack—precisely similar to the preceding ones—the arrival of the doctors sent for ; and Marsin's diagnosis, pointing to poisoning by digitalis. "Do you deny," continued the judge, "that the symptoms of this third and fatal attack were the same as those of the second one ?"

"No,"

"Then the second attack could not have been caused by digitalis, since your wife had not then begun to take her pills. Consequently, digitalis could not have caused your wife's death. Still, this was effected by some poison having the same effects as digitalis, producing vomiting, paralysis of the heart, and death. What poison was it?"

"That question must be asked of those who state that my wife was poisoned, not of me, for I contest the authenticity of their conclusions."

"Say that you deny it."

"I deny it, and I contest it, and I—"

"Do not open that question now. You will be able to discuss it with the experts. This is not the right moment to examine that point."

"But it resumes everything—"

"Do not be impatient. The truth will come out only too soon for you. The learning and honourability of the experts are worthy of all confidence. The necropsy showed that your wife was not ill."

"I contest the conclusions of the expert who accomplished that necropsy."

"Why did you refuse to be present at it?"

"From respect—out of love for my wife—"

"That's an explanation! The necropsy points to the absence of disease. On that point you may have as long a discussion with the experts as you think necessary for your defence. Now, the necropsy not having confirmed the explanation you gave of your wife's death, the victim's vomits were analysed and a part of her stomach and intestines were chemically treated. We will admit that no poison was found, but when the vomited matter and the chemically treated organs were administered to animals, those poor beasts died with all the symptoms noted in your wife. Therefore, the experts have not hesitated to declare that Madame Claude was poisoned, and they affirm that the poison administered to her was one of those which affect the heart. The prosecution does not produce this poison, it does not even name it, but it states that the fact of this poison not being discovered is the proof that it can only have been administered by the prisoner, who is a skilful medical man, too skilful in fact, and who prepared and carried out the poisoning of his wife in a methodical scientific manner, knowing beforehand that he would baffle chemistry, and hoping to defeat justice. Now, what have you to answer, prisoner?"

"Only one thing for the moment. Supposing I were the skilful medical man you say ; if, as you pretend, I had desired to kill my wife, I should not have poisoned her. I should have killed her gradually, while attending on her, or I might have given her a mortal disease. Would that not be elementary work for a doctor?"

"Perhaps ; but by this means you would not have killed her in a few hours ; she would have had time to revoke her will, which you did not wish her to do. The court adjourns until to-morrow." Claude's examination had lasted five hours.

VIII.

THE favourable impression which Claude's passionate declaration of love for his wife had produced on the audience had soon become effaced. Indeed, what declaration, however eloquent, could triumph over the so-called facts of the prosecution ? And these facts were seemingly proved. Those who had followed the proceedings were able to disengage the following points from the tangled skein in which the presiding judge had enveloped the interrogatory. Firstly, Claude had long remained without feeling any sympathy for Mademoiselle Veronica Lerissel, and he had only fallen in love with her when he heard that she was afflicted with heart disease. Secondly, the motive which led him to poison his wife, when he had obtained from her a will in his favour, was sufficiently imperative to induce him to act at once, despite any danger he might incur. Thirdly, his system of defence, according to which a doctor is not so foolish as to poison his wife when he can get rid of her by a natural illness, was without value, for if he were to profit by the will it was urgent that his wife should die soon after it was made.

Those who were present in court were undoubtedly impressed by Claude's cry of love for Veronica ; but then a sensational scene only affects those who witness it. The thousands who knew of the case simply by hearsay or by the newspaper reports were not likely to pay much attention to this incident. They based their opinions on actual facts, and these being to Claude's disadvantage, public opinion was more hostile than ever to the prisoner when the trial was resumed on the following day. Before the case had commenced there had been a few prudent

people who, despite popular clamour had replied to Claude's accusers with the words, "We must see." But at present they did not dare to give the prisoner even the benefit of this timid doubt. They *had* seen—seen the defence beaten on the capital points of the trial. So Claude's enemies were triumphant; as for his two or three friends, his few partisans, they were ill at ease and even ashamed. Some there were who already abandoned his cause and espoused that of the prosecution.

When Claude was seen to enter the dock it might, indeed, have been thought that he had abandoned his cause himself, so pale and haggard and downcast did he appear. That five hours' interrogatory, during which he had had to defend himself as much against his own indignant impulses as against the president's attacks, had literally broken his spirit. He could not deceive himself, the battle had gone against him; his defence had been weak in the extreme; and overwhelmed with the sentiment of his impotence he had passed a restless, feverish night. What would the morrow bring forth, what would the witnesses say?

The first of these latter was Mother Alexander, Claude's old servant, in the Rue de Savoie and the Rue des Saints Pères. "Raise your hand," exclaimed the presiding judge when she had advanced to the bar of the court. "You swear to speak without hatred and without fear, to speak the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Say I swear it."

"What am I to swear?"

"What I've just told you."

"I didn't catch a word of it."

Several of the spectators smiled; and, in truth, there was good ground for the old woman's remark. Although the presiding judge spoke most slowly and distinctly whenever he had to say anything which he considered important, he invariably slurred over any simple formality. He had administered the oath so many times in his life that he now-a-days took no interest in the proceeding, and at times would even have forgotten the formality altogether, if one of his assessors had not reminded him of it. Then again he divided witnesses into two categories: those who occupied some kind of social position, and those who occupied none at all, nondescript creatures, something between man and beast. To the members of the former category he always said, "Monsieur" and "Madame;" and if they were witnesses for the prosecution, and boasted titles of nobility, he persistently addressed them by these titles. On the other hand, he greeted the members of the second category as

"witness so-and-so," or as "woman so-and-so," and, as a rule, paid little attention to their testimony. As Mother Alexander was one of these latter nondescript creatures, it could not be expected that he would treat her with any semblance of deference.

Accordingly, he soon expedited her evidence, which only related to Claude's poverty in Paris and his custom of dining off a penny roll. As she was fond of her old master, and had not been exposed to the hostile influences of Condé, she desired to explain that the doctor's poverty had not prevented his being a very honest man, very kind, and exact in his payments ; but the presiding judge did not allow her to proceed very far in this course.

"That will do," he exclaimed ; "now go and sit down." He spoke in such a tone that the old woman had no alternative but to follow the usher without attempting a reply.

M. Hairies de la Freslonière excelled, by the way, in the pronunciation of that phrase "go and sit down," and it was necessary to see him preside on several occasions to form an idea of the many different ways in which he managed to utter those four short words. With Mother Alexander his intonation signified "Your chatter bothers us good woman, we have something else to do than to listen to your tittle tattle." When, on the other hand, he addressed himself to a witness whose decisive evidence had demolished the case for the prosecution, his manner indicated at the same time warning and forbearance: "You may consider yourself lucky that we don't have you arrested, and instead of sitting down it would, perhaps, be best for you to take yourself off altogether." Again, if he looked at the jury while ordering a witness to withdraw it was as much as to say, "You know gentlemen you needn't attach any importance to what you've just been told. Believe me, it signifies nothing." Finally, if he had to deal with a witness who having a troubled conscience grew confused, and hesitated in his replies, the president's injunction to sit down was uttered in an ironical tone as if to invite the laughter of the audience. It was needful for a witness to be a very big personage, indeed, for M. Hairies de la Freslonière to say to him "You may sit down," instead of employing his usual and more authoritative formulary ; and in making this modification he always took care to impress the witness with the favour he was conferring on him.

The second witness called by the usher was Lajardie, who being a wealthy tanner and son-in-law of the mayor of Condé

could not be treated with the same contempt as Mother Alexander. Besides, he might be an important witness for the prosecution, and it was necessary that his evidence should be made as damaging for Claude as possible. Lajardie stepped forward with a grave and serious air without turning his eyes towards Claude, whose presence he seemed to ignore. Although relating at considerable length his connection with Claude in Paris, he spoke as little as possible concerning their common misery, for now that he was himself a rich man he felt ashamed to admit that he had ever been poor. In the same manner he merely alluded to the circumstance that he had advised Claude to come to Condé, for he was now-a-days not at all proud of having succeeded in a mission of which the present trial was the disgraceful epilogue. Eventually he spoke of Claude's installation at Condé, and of the advice, he, Lajardie, had given him to marry Mademoiselle Lerissel.

"And he always refused?" asked the presiding judge.

"Always."

"You frequently made the suggestion?"

"More than a dozen times."

"Did you speak pressing?"

"Yes, I did at first, but not on the last occasions."

"Why not?"

"Because he had already repeatedly refused my advice, and because I had come to the conclusion that such a marriage was scarcely so desirable as I had at first thought."

"Had you learnt anything against Mademoiselle Lerissel?"

"Oh dear no!"

"Then, why had you changed your opinion?"

Lajardie hesitated for a moment. "Because," said he "Claude's constant refusals had led me to reflect that he had no sympathy for Mademoiselle Veronica, and that in such a case the marriage would scarcely prove a happy one."

"Your evidence will have struck the gentlemen of the jury," observed the president "by its very moderation. As you yourself say, the marriage was scarcely likely to prove a happy one, for if the prisoner had felt any sentiment of tenderness for Mademoiselle Lerissel he would eagerly have listened to your original proposals."

Mérault had risen from his seat. "I should like to ask the witness," he said, "if M. Claude did not one day speak to him of Mademoiselle Lerissel, in terms which at least betrayed a lively sentiment of admiration for her beauty?"

"You have heard," said the presiding judge, "what answer have you to give the counsel for the defence?"

"One day, a short time after Claude's arrival in Condé, I met him on the Boulevard du Château. He was walking very fast and seemed to be experiencing some unusual emotion. I asked him what was the matter, and he replied that he had just seen two superb women, Madame Gillet and Mademoiselle Veronica, and he spoke to me about them in most enthusiastic terms."

"About both of them?"

"Yes both of them."

"Then, perhaps, this may explain why he was so long making up his mind."

"When I saw him in this state," resumed Lajardie, "I told him that Mademoiselle Lerissel had 20,000 francs a year and that he ought to marry her. Instead of answering me he ran away."

"Is the counsel for the defence satisfied?" asked the presiding judge with affected good nature.

"Perfectly satisfied Monsieur le Président, I have obtained the answer I desired."

"So much the better. You have no further questions to ask the witness?"

"None whatever."

"So much the worse. You must not reserve your questions, they contribute as much as mine to the discovery of the truth."

"Evidently we both have the same object in view."

The presiding judge smiled, for the rejoinder was a smart one, but unfortunately not sufficiently emphasized to strike the audience. Quiet wit passes almost unperceived in a court of law, where success more readily awaits coarse, accentuated humour.

IX.

WHILST Claude was defending himself more or less successfully—rather the latter than the former—Nathalie was devoting all her energies to secure his acquittal. Being in court during the day, she only had the early morning and the evening at her disposal, and then she was to be seen perambulating the streets of Condé, bent on visiting all those who might assist her in oh-

taining the desired result. She called on the jurymen themselves, on their friends, and on their friends' friends, on every one who might exercise the slightest influence in the matter. Of course, she did not boldly come and ask that Claude might be acquitted; but she requested those she saw, to look at the case impartially, not to listen to the hostile remarks indulged in by the townsfolk, but to go to court with clear unbiassed minds; and if she were allowed to proceed so far she skilfully found a means of explaining the whole affair—proving Claude's innocence to the best of her ability, and asserting that he was either the victim of hatred or folly.

It was only seldom however that Nathalie was able to speak in this manner. As a rule she was checked directly she began to talk, and at times in the most brutal fashion. The jurymen would not hear anything, and most of their friends being pre-disposed against Claude, declined to allow her to speak in his defence. They themselves did not scruple to express their hopes that he would be condemned, adding that it would only be what he deserved; and they found these observations of theirs quite natural, although, on the other hand, it seemed a positive outrage against justice to talk of his innocence. They feared moreover lest they might compromise themselves, should they comply with Nathalie's request, and seek, however indirectly, to obtain his acquittal. "For your sake," they accordingly said to Nathalie, "we should not be sorry to see him prove his innocence. But it would be a grave matter for us to speak to our friends the jurymen. A jurymen is sacred, his conscience must be respected."

Rumours of Nathalie's endeavours soon came to the ears of the public prosecutor, and when the court assembled on the third day of the trial the presiding judge authorised M. Bassaget to speak. Like some jack in the box he rose with a jerk from his seat, and turning towards the jury he reminded them that never had twelve men been called together to judge a graver case. It was only by calmly meditating over the evidence they heard, by setting aside anything they might hear out of court, that they would be able to return a true and just verdict like men of honour as they were. "Do not forget, gentlemen of the jury," he observed, "that you have sworn a solemn oath before God and before man, and that you would be trifling with that oath were you to allow yourselves to be influenced by anything you might hear outside these walls. Jurymen, be honest men, be firm, and open neither your hearts nor your ears to the voices

of those who would save the guilty criminal in the dock before you. Jurymen, the eyes of France are turned towards you. Jurymen, God will judge you!"

In less pompous tones the presiding judge warned the jury not to allow their sentiments of devotion to lead them to neglect their personal comfort. The court was at their disposal to interrupt the sittings whenever they might feel tired. The case would probably last several days longer, and it was advisable to take every precaution, so that every one might be well in health and clear headed when the time arrived for the verdict and the sentence. In speaking in this manner the presiding judge was guided by a powerful motive. He had learnt that the only individual whom Nathalie had succeeded in winning over to her side was one of the supplementary jurymen, a certain Désiré Beauvisage; hence it was urgent that nothing should happen to any one of the original twelve, for if one of these latter fell ill, Beauvisage being the thirteenth on the list, would take his place, and the case for the prosecution might then fall through.

The witnesses set down to be heard on the third day of the trial were Drs. Caradon, Nautier, Graux, and Marsin, Madame Mérault, Cousin Quite-Well? and Nathalie. The sitting accordingly promised to be an interesting one. The prosecution wished to limit old Caradon's evidence to one point alone, namely, the steps which Claude had taken prior to marriage, to ascertain whether Veronica was liable to an hereditary complaint of the heart. This was an important matter in the eyes of the prosecution, for it showed that the prisoner had paid great attention to this question of heart disease before marrying Mademoiselle Lerissel. But then Caradon was a most obstinate old fellow whom no one had ever yet silenced. He said what he chose, and only what he chose. It was, moreover, known that he was favourable to Claude, and, consequently, it was impossible to foresee what he might say. He was not the sort of witness to obey the familiar injunction to go and sit down. He was bent upon defending his "young colleague" as he repeatedly styled Claude, and he did so boldly and frankly, despite the interruptions of the presiding judge, who tried his utmost to confuse and stop him. But it was all in vain; in a simple good-natured manner the old fellow pursued his course, speaking in a slow, firm, loud voice.

"Well," ultimately said the presiding judge, "your evidence proves two things."

"Only one, Monsieur le Président," interrupted Caradon, "my young colleague's innocence."

"That is an appreciation which we must leave to the gentlemen of the jury, but I say that your evidence demonstrates two facts. Firstly, that Claude endeavoured to learn whether she whom he was incited to marry was not afflicted with a complaint of the heart."

"Which was very natural."

"And secondly, that you were mistaken when you declared that she was dying from an ulcerated chest and stomach. Do you admit that you were in error, and that Madame Claude did not die from the effects of the ulcerations you imagined?"

Caradon took a pinch of snuff. "Its true, Monsieur le Président," said he, "I made a mistake; but you know there are medical errors just as there are judicial errors. One may make a mistake about the stomach, just as much as about the brain."

"Has the counsel for the defence any questions to ask the witness," quickly asked the presiding judge.

"No, Monsieur le Président."

"I thought not," observed M. Hairies de la Freslonière, who by this retort avenged himself on Caradon for his raillery. This "I thought not," plainly signified that the old fellow's evidence had been inspired from beginning to end by the prisoner's counsel.

It was advisable, however, that any effect which Caradon's words might have caused, should be effaced by means of some other testimony, most damaging for Claude, and accordingly Cousin Quite-Well? was requested to step to the bar of the court. Such a venerable person could not be allowed to stand like an ordinary witness, and accordingly a chair was brought for her. When she had seated herself comfortably she gave full play to her emotion and indignation. She dived into the past, and related at great length how, when the marriage contract was signed, she had prevented her young cousin from handing all her fortune over to a man "whom already at that epoch, she believed to be capable of anything." Then she told the court how she had been driven from the house by Claude's ill-treatment and want of respect, and finally, she spoke of her last visit, of her advice concerning the will, and of her denunciation. She was several times obliged to pause and wipe the tears from her eyes, and indeed, once or twice she showed an inclination to faint. Had it not been for the encouraging words

of the presiding judge, she would probably have been unable to complete her evidence.

This was so damaging for the prisoner, that M. Hairies de la Freslonière felt that he might now with all safety call Madame Mérault, who would of course speak in Claude's favour. Then he would hear Drs. Nautier, Graux, and Marsin, who would efface any impression the advocate's wife might cause; and finally he would summon Madame Gillet to the bar. As Cousin Quite-Well's testimony had put him in a good humour, he resolved to be most gracious towards Mérault's wife—hoping thereby to conciliate the advocate, who as it had been suggested, might one day become Keeper of the Seals. With this object in view, when he asked Denise her age, he took care to be seized with a fit of coughing, which prevented her answer—"twenty-seven"—from being heard by the greater part of the audience.

When Madame Mérault presented herself at the bar of the court she was in a state of great confusion, and as she turned, while speaking, towards the seat her husband occupied, the presiding judge graciously intervened. "Kindly look at the gentlemen of the jury," said he, "we all of us understand the irresistible motive which impelled you to look in that direction," and with a wave of the hand he designated Mérault's seat—"but your evidence should be addressed to the jury." If after that little speech the prisoner's counsel was not well pleased, he must indeed be a most difficult man to satisfy.

Although Denise's narrative was just what it was meant to be, that is entirely to Claude's advantage, the presiding judge only interrupted her on one occasion. "This is the evidence of friendship," he observed—glancing towards the jurymen, as much as to say that it was of very little importance, in fact, a mere prelude to the speech for the defence.

After Denise, Doctors Graux, Marsin, and Nautier appeared at the bar; and then the ushers called for Madame Gillet. Her name provoked a movement of curiosity. Every one was acquainted with the steps she was taking in Claude's favour, and it would be interesting to see how she herself would now defend him. Her face was unveiled, and her beauty, heightened by fever and emotion, caused a positive sensation, not merely among those who did not know her, but even among those who were accustomed to see her; never indeed had she seemed so supremely handsome.

"Say what you have to say," exclaimed the presiding judge in a harsh voice, but at the same time he did not allow her to

proceed uninterrupted. "You must not bring a prepared narrative here," he exclaimed, "therefore, before everything you had best reply to my questions. Already during the preparatory investigation you strangely varied your answers. I warn you to weigh your words. You were the unfortunate victim's cousin, her nearest relative, her presumptive heir. To-day you display a singular and unscrupulous activity in defending the man whom the law pursues as her assassin. There is something mysterious in your conduct, and the friends of justice may well ask themselves in what interest you are acting. Answer me on that point."

"In the interest of truth," said Nathalie, and then turning towards Claude she added, "and in the interest of friendship."

"Well, I won't insist on that point for the present, but I must call the attention of the jury to the fact that in several circumstances you have been guided by a narrow-minded egotistical interest. For instance, did you not try to prevent your cousin from marrying, in order to retain the management of her fortune; and was it not with this object that you made her believe that she was suffering from a complaint of the heart?"

"It was Dr. Nautier who stated that she was affected with that complaint."

"Dr. Nautier has just told us that he does not remember having found any certain evidence of that malady."

"His memory is at fault."

At this moment, M. Bassaget intervened. "The gentlemen of the jury will recollect," said he, "that it was the fate of this unfortunate Madame Claude to be traded upon by those who should have loved her. When she was a young girl, her cousin persuaded her that she had a complaint of the heart, so as to prevent her marrying. When she was married her husband gave her this complaint of the heart, so as to get rid of her. Her cousin wished to share her income; her husband wished to get hold of her entire fortune."

"It was also interest," resumed the presiding judge, speaking to Nathalie, "that led you to dispose of your house. The prisoner, wishing to isolate himself, was only able to get rid of you by paying you a larger sum than your house was actually worth. You accepted that money, although you were aware that it was your cousin's. The jury will know how to appreciate that circumstance. Now you may proceed."

Although Nathalie was greatly affected and upset by the

suspicious which the judge had expressed, she summoned all her strength and nerve to her assistance, and said everything she thought likely to influence the jury in the prisoner's favour, especially insisting on his love for Veronica—that love which had caused her such bitter torture.

"That's a sentimental allegation," interrupted the presiding judge, "based on nothing."

"Based on what I saw, on what my cousin told me!"

"On what you pretend you saw, on what you pretend you were told."

"But also on what my cousin wrote to me two days before she died."

"You must not read your evidence."

"May I not read that letter?"

"Why did you not speak of that letter during the investigation?"

"Because I thought that it was sufficient for me to affirm my knowledge of Dr. Claude's love for my cousin."

"I ask that the letter may be read," exclaimed Mérault.

"Be it so," replied the presiding judge; "in virtue of our discretionary power we will read it."

M. Hairies de la Freslonière was very fond of talking about his discretionary power, and he pronounced these words with an air of importance well calculated to impress and frighten an ignorant public. Although he designedly slurred over the reading of Veronica's last epistle, still the statements it contained concerning Cousin Quite-Well's visit and Claude's fervent affection, produced a marked effect upon the audience; and when the prisoner was heard sobbing in the dock, the tears rushed into more than one woman's eyes.

The presiding judge did not allow this emotion to spread. Addressing himself to Nathalie, who had remained standing at the bar, he pressed her with questions, scarcely allowing her time to reply, going from one subject to another, and even speaking of matters that had no possible connection with the trial. "Well," he ultimately said, "I can see that we shall not be easily enlightened concerning this communication, as strange as it is tardy; however, I am only half surprised, for the information we possess concerning your morality is very unfavourable to you."

Nathalie grew pale, but she did not speak.

"You don't reply?"

"A woman does not answer an insult."

"She justifies herself."

"Who accuses me?"

"That's enough. Go and sit down!"

X.

"WHAT is Madame Gillet's object in displaying such zeal in Dr. Claude's defence?" Such was the question asked by every one in Condé after she had given her evidence. Claude explained to himself this zeal of hers by the conviction she entertained that he was not guilty, as well as by the motive she had openly confessed—namely, friendship. She had not forgotten that they had once loved each other, and time having transformed her affection into friendship, the latter now displayed itself at the hour of danger. By the prosecution and the public it was considered that Nathalie must have an interest in acting as she did, but what interest it was, no one could at first precisely see.

It was indeed remarked that being her cousin's natural heir, she should rather have been among Claude's adversaries, than among his friends, since his condemnation, by annulling the will, would place Veronica's fortune at her disposal. An ordinary woman could doubtless have reasoned in that sense, but then, Madame Gillet was not an ordinary woman; she was a *rouée*, rich in ruses, who invariably followed a bye-path in preference to the high road. If Dr. Claude were condemned, she would inherit his wife's fortune, and then she would be able to vaunt her disinterestedness, her abnegation; she would be in a position to say that she had done all she could to prevent his condemnation—listening to her conscience rather than to her interests. If, on the other hand, he were acquitted, she would have paved the way for this result, and he could not show himself ungrateful for the signal services she had rendered him. How far would his gratitude go? A skilful woman like her might easily persuade him to marry her. In one or the other case, she would always profit by her cousin's fortune, for in the first instance she would be her heir, and in the second she would become the legatee's wife. Really her scheme was a clever one, and many people now plainly saw the interest she had in aiding and abetting the defence.

There were, however, others who did not accept this reason-

ing, who replied that if Madame Gillet were indifferent as to the result—acquittal or condemnation—it was not natural that she should give herself so much trouble, or so gravely compromise herself by her exertions in the prisoner's behalf. These people tried to discover another motive for her conduct, and indulged in the most extravagant suppositions without arriving at any precise result.

In the same manner, people did not unanimously appreciate the part which the presiding judge had played during Madame Gillet's examination. Whilst some few approved him, most people blamed him. What right had he to insult a witness, especially when this witness was a young and handsome woman? What was this unfavourable information he had alluded to? What was its source? Was it proper for a judge to make himself the mouthpiece of calumny in open court? He should have remembered that she whom he addressed in a moment of anger, was after all a woman of society, received everywhere, so that the outrage he had inflicted upon her when he was at a loss for a retort would affect some of the most honourable people in Condé.

The next day's sitting put an end to this exchange of remarks which after occupying the town, during the whole of the evening, were resumed in court on the following morning, before the judge, jury, and prisoner had taken their seats. As this sitting was to be devoted to the experts' evidence, it promised to be most interesting, and so everybody hurried to their posts. It was rumoured that the fight would be a severe one, and at all events people would now learn what Vandam the Paris chemist had to say to Evette and little Senelle.

Precisely because the sitting was to be an interesting one, the presiding judge assumed a most indifferent air, and it was in an almost nonchalant tone that he observed to one of the ushers: "Introduce Doctor Evette."

At these words the silence became general, and as Evette entered the court, every one leant forward to catch a glimpse of him. He advanced neither too quickly nor too slowly—looking neither to the right nor to the left, but with his eyes fixed upon the bench, more particularly upon the presiding judge. On reaching the bar, he made a bow, which was almost a genuflection, and then respectfully waited until he was spoken to. It was impossible to display a more modest demeanour or one better calculated to win the sympathy of his audience. A lady's lecturer could not have assumed a more amiable air—

what a difference between this smiling engaging physiognomy and Claude's haggard face !

It was in a soft, caressing, insinuating, persuasive voice that Evette explained to the jury, how he had been entrusted with accomplishing the necropsy of Madame Claude's "remains," for he took especial care to avoid that horrible word "corpse." He stated that the victim's body was that of an admirably constituted young woman, well proportioned, tall and of great plastic beauty. Those who glanced at Claude whilst Evette was thus speaking, saw the blood rush to his face. But the clerical physician paid no attention to the circumstance, he continued his description in the most minute fashion, and his studied paraphrases, assumed, thanks to his tone, a positive character of indecency. He next passed to the necropsy itself, but on this subject he was briefer, preferring not to call things by their right names, or to go into precise details, for he was afraid of provoking the horror or disgust of the fairer portion of the audience. What would his lady patients who sat there, drinking in his honeyed words, think of him, if he were to enter into a minute description of the horrible operation he had performed. Besides, he knew that Claude had criticised the manner in which he had accomplished this necropsy, and he was not desirous of furnishing him with an additional weapon of defence. He therefore passed as quickly as he could to the results, stating that after having looked everywhere for the causes of death, he had found no traces of natural disease either in the heart or in the brain, either in the lungs or in the digestive organs—consequently finding no natural explanation, he had been obliged to seek for one elsewhere.

At this point Evette was interrupted by the presiding judge, who felt that these conclusions were sufficiently important for the jury's attention to be directed to them. "You have admirably explained," said he, "the first part of your operations, and you have done so in such a manner that the gentlemen of the jury have been already able to form a conclusion on the subject ; however, I should like to ask you a question which must have presented itself to the minds of several people—It is said that before her marriage, the victim experienced palpitations of the heart. Now, could these have existed without leaving any traces behind them?"

When Evette was paid a compliment, it was his habit to return it threefold. "It was with learned penetration, Monsieur le Président," said he, "with profound sagacity, that you have

mentioned a point to which I intended to refer. There are palpitations that are connected with wounds, but there are others that manifest themselves in perfectly healthy organs. This was the case with the unfortunate lady we are speaking of ; her heart, which we have had the grief of seeing, was such a one as I should like my best friends to have." He spoke these words with a smile on his lips, and then dealt with the extraneous causes that might have produced death, with the chemical analysis and the search made for the poison. On this latter point, however, he was also very brief "for he desired," he said, "to leave the honour of exposing the results of this analysis to the learned chemist who had assisted him in his task." In reality, however, he was taking his precautions so as to avoid, if possible, an encounter with Vandam, and to throw all the responsibility of the analysis on to little Senelle's shoulders.

On the other hand, Evette indulged in numerous developments concerning the physiological experiments. He had most acutely felt the reproaches directed against him for the massacre of cats and dogs, with which he was charged ; he was also somewhat nervous concerning the action which one old lady had brought against him, for having killed her pet dog, and was desirous of publicly defending himself. At length, having reached the end of his story, Evette thought fit to make a pause, "I have now," he added, after a moment's interval, "to recapitulate our conclusions. Firstly, Madame Claude was in a state of perfect health. Secondly, her death was not brought about by any natural cause. Thirdly, she was poisoned. Fourthly, the poison administered to her was a vegetable poison which does not leave any characteristic traces in the organs, and cannot be isolated. Fifthly, it reveals itself by its action. Sixthly, it revealed itself during our experiments, for it killed the animals on which we experimented. Seventhly, the effects it had on these animals were similar to the symptoms of Madame Claude—so that one may affirm that both the victim and these poor beasts died of precisely the same paralysis of the heart."

"Therefore, in your opinion," said the presiding judge, "there is no doubt concerning the poisoning. The nature of the poison is not an essential point since its presence is sufficiently manifested by its effects :—vomiting, slackening of the action of the heart, muscular resolution, and death."

"That is my opinion condensed with striking clearness," answered Evette.

"Now, once again, Doctor Evette, do you, a man of science, a man of honour, do you positively affirm that this is a case of poisoning?"

Evette remained for a moment in an attitude of profound meditation, then raising his right hand, "I swear," said he, "I swear that Madame Claude died poisoned." A murmur of horror escaped the audience.

"Well, prisoner, what have you to answer?" asked the presiding judge.

"One does not enter into a medical discussion," answered Claude, "when one is seated in this dock."

The presiding judge seemed disappointed. "However, you ought to defend yourself."

"I will defend myself."

"Then speak."

"Later on. For the moment I offer a most formal denial to the conclusions of the necropsy and the physiological experiments."

XI.

THE president had believed in an encounter between the expert and the prisoner, and he had even promised one beforehand to several of his friends. It would be a curious sight, for Evette was skilful and Claude was energetic. The result could not however be doubtful. Evette with his easy, calm, abundant elocution, giving way in one point to defeat his adversary in another, would easily master Claude, whose violence would wear him out. The clerical practitioner would now have his revenge for the famous "roast apple" incident at the trial of the brothers Vilaine. Even if Claude did manage at times to discomfort Evette what would it matter? Those medical men were all deserving of a lesson. For some time past they had been carrying their heads too high, and in court no one has the right of carrying his head erect save the judge who personates society.

It was really strange that Claude should have declined this encounter, for to look at him while Evette was speaking, it really seemed as if he were unable to contain himself. If his lips did not move, his burning glances, his contracted brows, his sudden starts, his oppressed breathing, the vivid colour and

death-like pallor which alternately invaded his cheeks, the spasmodic movements of his hands—everything betrayed the emotion under which he laboured and the effort he was making not to allow himself to be led away by his feelings. Evidently in not speaking Claude had obeyed the advice of his advocate who had thought it prudent to abstain from a discussion in which his client had every chance against him. It was really too bad of Mérault to have given Claude that advice. In fact, the advocate ought not to be placed so near the prisoner, and they ought to be prevented from communicating with each other while the trial was in progress. However, we must hope that after all, this encounter would only be retarded. Unfortunately, the moment for the engagement would now be chosen by Claude, or rather by Mérault, which was greatly to be regretted in view of the final result.

After the first expert came the second, Théodule-Isidore Senelle, forty years of age, and chemist of the first class. Little Senelle was modest both in his manner and his words as becomes a chemist, even one of the first class, when he has to speak after a physician on whose good will his business in part depends. Senelle's wife, a sensible prudent woman who during the past ten years had sat all day long in the shop, enthroned between a pair of blue and green globes, had very properly advised her husband not to attempt to eclipse Dr. Evette; and in obedience to this injunction, the propriety of which he willingly admitted, little Senelle remained on his guard. His evidence, as reserved in form as it was decided in spirit, was a model of prudence and precision. On one point alone was his skill inferior to Evette's, he did not deplore the death of the animals on which he and his fellow-expert had experimented. He enumerated these sacrifices with the air of a man of science who has not to take the animals' sufferings into account, but only to regard the result of the mission confided to him. Evette was accordingly able to smile at the audience in a complacent fashion, as much as to say, "You see, I have not accused him. He is spontaneously owning that it was he who so cruelly killed all those poor animals. You will now understand how unjust you have all been towards me—the kindest hearted man in the world."

Senelle's conclusions were less authoritative than Evette's. He admitted that the symptoms detected in the animals were those produced by a muscular poison, but he did not compare these symptoms with those which had been noted in Madame

Claude, and when the presiding judge would have pressed him on this point he modestly replied. "Excuse me, Monsieur le Président, I am not a doctor, I am a chemist." Thereupon, having nothing more to say, his slight fair-haired figure was seen to leave the bar, after saluting with equal respect the bench and the jury. Then, bending his head forward, and glancing through the blue spectacles perched upon his nose, so as to pick his way through the crowd, the Condé chemist went and sat down by the side of Evette, who appeared by no means flattered to find himself in such company.

"You don't wish to ask anything?" enquired the presiding judge, looking at Claude.

"No Monsieur le Président."

Accordingly M. Hairies de la Freslonière turned towards one of the ushers. "Call the chemist Vandam," he said, disdainfully emphasizing the professional prefix with which he honoured the Parisian savant's name. "This witness," he added looking at the jury, "is called by the counsel for the defence." Then, noticing that Vandam had already reached the bar, where, after saluting Claude, he stood waiting, the presiding judge said to him:—"You were the prisoner's friend, I believe?"

"I was his friend and I am so now."

The presiding judge heaved a sigh of pity and looked at the jury. Then, after administering the oath, he exclaimed. "Now chemist Vandam, you may speak since you have been called here to contradict the experts. Speak, explain yourself, prove that they are mistaken; say everything you think useful for the defence of—your friend."

The chemist Vandam was about to obey this injunction, when the presiding judge who had thrown himself back in his arm-chair with an air of resignation, suddenly leant forward again. He made a sign to Vandam to wait a minute, and then speaking to one of the ushers in a tone which was sufficiently audible to reach the jury-box, he said:—"Just see that those gentlemen have all the writing materials they require." These words were intended as much for the jurymen as for the usher, and it did not need any great perception to discover their drift. "You know, gentlemen of the jury," the president meant to insinuate, "this evidence may last some time but it will signify nothing. You may accordingly utilize the interval in writing to your families or in occupying yourselves with your business affairs." Personally the judge assumed the demeanour of a martyr who has resigned himself to be bored to death.

Fortunately, Vandam was not easily disconcerted. "I am here," he said, "to examine the medico-chemical experiments, and I shall only deal with them from a toxicological point of view."

"You are a medical man?" asked the presiding judge.

"I am a doctor of medicine."

"You told us that when you gave us your name, but I wish to know whether you practice medicine."

"I teach it."

"A school-room doctor then. That will do—you may continue."

Vandam then began to explain that it was not sufficient for the experts to affirm that Madame Claude had been poisoned. However energetic their affirmations might be it was only possible to conclude with certainty that the deceased had met her death in this manner, if the toxical matter said to have caused it were produced. As for the physiological experiments, they would only have importance if they were accomplished with an isolated and fully characteristic substance. Now he found the experts' reports unsatisfactory in both these respects. The toxical substance to which Madame Claude's death was attributed had not been found, and, consequently, it was not known with what the physiological experiments had really been accomplished.

"With extracts prepared by the experts," interrupted the presiding judge.

"Perfectly, with extracts formed firstly, of the vomited matter, secondly, of the organs themselves, and thirdly, of the stains found on the flooring of the bedroom. But what did these extracts contain that is my question? The experts reply that they contained a poison, and that this poison killed the animals on which they experimented. I do not deny the death of these animals, but I deny the poison, or rather, I say that these extracts themselves, without the admixture of any foreign substance, naturally constituted a poison. We are no longer in the days when experts affirmed as in a celebrated case which ended in an innocent man being sentenced to death, that the most putrid meat does not yield, either in water or in alcohol, any soluble principle capable of poisoning. Experiments have since been made which show that alcoholic extracts of natural vomited matter, or of matter found in the stomachs of corpses, have of themselves produced toxical effects."

"Did you make those experiments?" inquired the presiding

judge, who, despite his pre-determined resolution to remain perfectly indifferent to anything Vandam might say, was incapable of listening any longer without putting in a word of his own.

"No, Monsieur le Président, they were made by most eminent chemists, by Fagge, Stevenson, and Dr. Homolla. I therefore say that the experiments made with the extracts of the victim's organs are entirely without value, for who would dare to pretend that an extract from a dead body is innocuous? Regarding the extract prepared by scraping the flooring of the bedroom, I hold the same views. Was the flooring a new one? No. What might not have been there? No one knows. We can none of us tell. The only certain thing is that this room was for years inhabited by Dr. Gillet, a physician who was particularly versed in the study of poisons, and latterly it was occupied by another doctor. Now this flooring was scraped, an extract of the scrapings was obtained, and this extract poisoned the animals into whose bodies it was injected. I willingly admit that such was the case. But the experts say these animals died from the effects of the mysterious poison, of which they so constantly speak, but which they don't define. For my part, I say that they were killed by decomposition of the blood, resulting from the injection of putrid matter. When a surgeon is performing an operation does he not sometimes die simply from pricking himself accidentally with an instrument he has been making use of?"

"But," said the president, "there is the extract derived from the vomited matter which was preserved in a basin. There were no scrapings in that, no extract of dead body. And yet it killed the animals into which it was injected, and the symptoms which preceded their death were, according to the experts, identical with those which Madame Claude exhibited.

"I was going to speak of that extract. The gentlemen of the jury are aware that Madame Claude was ill."

"She was not at all ill, that has been demonstrated."

"At all events, she was being treated for a complaint of the heart, and she had been taking digitalis for five-and-twenty days. She had even swallowed a pill of that substance a short time before this fatal attack. Therefore, I say, your cats, your dogs, your rabbits, to whom the extract with which I have now to deal was administered, were poisoned by the digitalis this extract contained, and I find a proof that such was the case in the very symptoms which the experts observed in these animals."

"But could a millegramme of digitalis mingled in the matter

vomited by Madame Claude, the greater part of which was not recovered, have sufficed to occasion that result ? ”

“ It is not a question of a milegramme. Madame Claude had been taking digitalis for twenty-five days, and every one knows that this substance is only eliminated with difficulty. Under these circumstances I am well founded in my conclusion that the experts’ reports do not at all prove that Madame Claude was poisoned.” These words uttered in a clear firm voice caused a great sensation throughout the court, and the presiding judge hastened to adjourn the sitting for a quarter of an hour.

Vandam’s evidence seemed important ; and it was evident that it had produced a certain impression on the jury, they had been particularly struck with his observations respecting the extract from a dead body. On the first day of the trial these twelve intelligent men had been able to maintain the dignified impassive attitude of so many wax figures, a demeanour appropriate to the importance of their functions, but by degrees nature had asserted its rights, and it was now easy to read on their features what they thought or felt. As it appeared evident that the opinion they had formed of Vandam’s evidence was scarcely favourable to the prosecution, it became necessary for the latter to take immediate steps to efface the impression which the Parisian chemist had created ; hence this adjournment of the court, suggested to the presiding judge by a glance from the public prosecutor.

Although nominally of a quarter of an hour’s duration this adjournment lasted in reality much longer. One of the ushers came and spoke in an undertone to Evette who was holding forth to a group of spectators and he forthwith left the court. Soon afterwards a similar incident occurred in regard to little Senelle. Then every one began to ask themselves what was about to happen, and while the spectators were indulging in numerous improbable conjectures, the glass jars which had originally been removed at Méréault’s request, were brought back again, one by one, and placed upon the table in the well of the court. This incident provoked general comment.

“ What, are the rival medical men going to make comparative experiments in presence of the public ! ”

“ How horrible ! ”

“ What a piece of luck for us.”

“ Let us make haste and take some refreshment.”

Eventually every one resumed his seat, and the presiding judge said to one of the ushers. “ Call the experts and the

chemist Vandam." The discontented expression on the president's face when he adjourned the court had now given place to an air of mingled cunning and satisfaction.

"Look at the presiding judge," exclaimed an advocate, "he seems quite joyful at the prospect of a set-to between the experts. You may be certain he won't calm them; it will be a fine fight." But instead of a set-to between the experts there followed a dialogue between the president and Vandam.

"You performed a chemical analysis for the prisoner?" observed M. Hairies de la Freslonière.

Vandam related what had transpired when Claude originally suspected that his wife had been poisoned.

"So," said the presiding judge, "you and the prisoner engaged in a correspondance concerning poisons. You gave him advice?"

"I had no advice to give him; I answered his questions."

"However, you re-assured him by stating that the poison contained in the matters which you examined could not be isolated."

"I informed him that I had not found any poison in the matters he sent to me."

"That's it; you had already taken part in the question."

"Not at all. I had taken part in a special question which is not at all the same as the one which now occupies us."

"The prosecution asserts that it is the same. The gentlemen of the jury will know how to appreciate your distinction. At all events it is certain that the prisoner was bound to have confidence in you, for you are—are you not?—the author of a work entitled '*A critical Study of Medico-Legal Experiments.*'"

"Yes, I wrote that work."

"I won't say that this book has any great value, but at all events it shows that you had already occupied yourself with the subject before us. It is true that in doing so you displayed the most blamable tendencies, testifying no respect for the decisions of the law."

"I did not occupy myself with the decisions of the law. I criticized these experiments from an exclusively scientific point of view; and many others have done the same—Grandeau, Lefort, Gaultier de Claubry, Rabuteau have criticized the medico-legal experiments regarding digitalis; Galippe dealt with those concerning cases of poisoning by copper and its component parts. There are ten others, twenty others, who have acted likewise."

"That is possible, but those twenty others did not act in the spirit of systematic hostility which you display—a spirit of

hostility which leads you so far, that you even advise the criminals of foreign countries."

"An Italian advocate did me the honour to ask for my opinion regarding a charge of poisoning, and I gave it him."

"And naturally it was directed against the official experts. I read in one of your books a definition of the soul, which I do not understand very well; it is assuredly my own fault; but, at the same time, it appears to me to be a declaration of pure materialism, that is to say, the negation of the very basis of society."

"My books are not concerned in this trial. I am here as a witness."

"And it is the witness whom I question so that the gentlemen of the jury may know what manner of man he is. Since it displeases you to give a public answer on this point—which I can understand—we will pass it by."

While this dialogue was progressing, Evette and Senelle stood at Vandam's side in a somewhat embarrassed manner. Fortunately, the presiding judge recollected that they were waiting. "Doctor Evette," said he, "you have heard the evidence of the chemist Vandam."

"Certainly, Monsieur le Président, I listened to his learned lesson with great interest, but although it was most ingenious, I must own that it has in no wise modified my sentiments—I would rather say, my convictions—and I declare that far from destroying our conclusions, it has left them intact." Then at great length and in most polite flowery language, full of compliments for his learned adversary, Evette refuted the evidence of the chemist Vandam—refuted it so completely that nothing of it remained. When he ceased to speak, the jurymen were once more gained over to his side. In a few hours they had in turns formed the most contrary opinions. At first they had adopted Evette's views: Madame Claude had been poisoned, and the animals experimented upon had been killed with the same poison that had been employed to kill her. Then they had accepted Vandam's theory, the animals had been killed by the scrapings of flooring, the extract from a corpse, and the digitalis which the victim had been taking. Now, however, they once more returned to Evette's opinion. Besides this, Vandam was not what they had at first thought him to be. The presiding judge had shown them that he was an intriguer, an adversary of society; perhaps, moreover, he had not merely contented himself with giving advice to Claude.

"And you, what do you say, Monsieur Senelle?" asked the presiding judge, when Evette's discourse was at an end.

"I am of Dr. Evette's opinion," replied the Condé chemist.

"You see," said the presiding judge to Vandam, in a tone of consideration.

"I see that we don't agree, but that is all. The experts persist in their conclusions, but they don't answer my objections. They don't produce the poison which, according to them, killed Madame Claude; and they don't prove that the animals they experimented on were not poisoned as I say, either by putrid matter, or by digitalis."

"After an analysis the remains of a millegramme of digitalis would not suffice to cause the death of several animals," said Evette.

"I repeat that this is not a question of a millegramme but of two millegrammes multiplied by twenty-five days—that is to say, fifty millegrammes of digitalis swallowed by Madame Claude. During your analysis you ought to have found this substance on the coatings of the stomach and in the digestive tube, which, according to Dragendorff, become impregnated with digitalis."

"That is not at all proved, and we maintain that digitalis is easily eliminated."

"I contest that doctrine. Mann saw a patient—"

The presiding judge interrupted Vandam. "You are appropriating," he said, "the remarks of various learned men whose works you have more or less carefully read; but you yourself, you know nothing, you cannot affirm whether digitalis accumulates or whether it passes away."

"At least, I know that the experts did not even isolate the digitalis."

"Probably because they found none."

"If they found none it must have been because they didn't look for any."

"I beg your pardon," said Senelle, "we did find some, but not in a sufficient quantity to cause death."

"Why did you not operate more extensively?"

"Because we wished to reserve a part of the matters confided to us," replied Evette, "in view of fresh experiments if they were ordered by the court. We are bitterly criticized because we did not sacrifice everything, but we should be still more bitterly criticized if we had reserved nothing."

"I criticize you, because you paid no attention to the digitalis,

and I criticize you particularly because you did not isolate the poison which in your opinion killed Madame Claude, thus forgetting Plenck's rule, which all experts ought always to have before their eyes :—*unicum, certum, signum.*"

The presiding judge quickly interrupted Vandam. "We are not at the Comédie Française," he said, "and we are not performing the *Malaïe Imaginaire*, of which your Latin would be well worthy. This is a most serious matter—a matter of life or death."

"I speak seriously," retorted Vandam, "when I affirm that these gentlemen's experiments do not prove that Madame Claude was poisoned."

"Allow me to tell you, sir, that you exceed your rôle and I must warn the gentlemen of the jury that you have not to occupy yourself with Madame Claude, nor to affirm whether she was or was not poisoned. You were not called for that. You know nothing of the criminal investigation. You are, if I may so express myself, the animals' expert." At this remark several of the spectators thought fit to titter. "You believe theoretically," continued the presiding judge, "that these animals were poisoned with the extract from a corpse, floor scrapings, or digitalis. Such is your belief, and you openly express it. I must add that it is quite legitimate for you to have such a belief and people should not laugh at you." While this little speech was being made Mérault had risen from his seat and stood with his advocate's cap in hand waiting to speak. The presiding judge invited him to do so.

"In presence of the different opinions expressed by these gentlemen," said the advocate, "it is necessary to take a step, which, as the prisoner's counsel, I formally ask should be taken, that is may it please the court to order additional experiments to show what action the digitalis may have caused." And then, amid general astonishment and anxiety, Mérault developed his reasons for this request.

Additional experiments! But then the case would be postponed until next session. Who could say when it would end? The presiding judge appeared most discontented. What had he done for Mérault to play him this trick. Hadn't he shown himself sufficiently amiable for the advocate and his wife since the trial began? Really this was monstrous ingratitude. "Is it the intention of the defence to ask that the affair be postponed till next session?" he asked when Mérault had ceased speaking.

"Not at all. We ask that fresh experts be appointed to

analyse the matters held in reserve, these experts to make their report as soon as possible."

"The court will deliberate on the point."

People breathed again; those who had received the president's cards of invitation would after all be able to witness the close of the affair. The result of the court's deliberation was soon made known. The tribunal appointed three fresh experts to search for any traces of digitalis that could be found either in the reserved matter or in the body of the late Madame Claude, which was if necessary to be exhumed.

At these last words Claude was seen to lean towards Méréault and to speak to him in a vehement manner. It was in vain that the advocate tried to calm him.

"He is frightened," said some people.

"He won't have the corpse exhumed," said others.

But the scene was abruptly brought to a close, for at this moment the presiding judge announced that the court adjourned until the following day.

XII.

ALTOGETHER the presiding judge was very well satisfied with the manner in which he had as yet conducted the proceedings. The sittings were all of them interesting. There had been several dramatic incidents. Public interest continued at its height. The court was always full and the audience well disposed. The newspaper reports were as faithful as possible, and moreover they did him justice. He was himself well aware that he had played his part in an effective manner, for the points he had made had been alike frequent and most successful. He was only vexed at one thing—the dearth of humour. If there had only been plenty of smiles, and at times a peal of laughter, but one had had none of those explosions of gaiety that put every one in a good humour for the rest of the day.

This was a great pity. The public might complain of this want of humorous incident. The trial would become monotonous without a few hearty bursts of laughter. Personally, moreover, the presiding judge loved to blend the comic and the tragic together, for, unlike most of his colleagues who swear by Horace de Boileau, he had a decided Shakspearian taste. But how was he to strike a comic note? Passaget was the very im-

personation of gravity ; Mérault also was of a serious nature and in addition he was labouring under intense emotion. He, the presiding judge, was therefore thrown back on his own resources ; there was no one to second any endcavours he might make to introduce some laughable incident. People ought to recollect, however, that he couldn't do everything himself. Besides, he had hitherto been obliged to give the prosecution all needful assistance, and his own initiative had consequently been paralysed. More than once he had refrained from making some humorous sally, so as not to weaken the case against Claude. For the jury must not be allowed to go astray. Personal interests, as well as the interests of justice, demanded that the prisoner should be condemned.

Fortunately, there now only remained to be heard a certain number of witnesses for the defence, with whom it was not necessary to be affable, and, if need be, some of their evidence might be turned topsy-turvy with the view of producing a laughable effect. Of course this could scarcely be done as regards either the testimony of Carbonneau, the great Parisian physician, or that of Abbé Colombe the venerable curé of Hannebault, but then many of Claude's witnesses were not personages like these, and such as were not, might easily be utilized for the purpose which he, the presiding judge, had in view.

Moreover, if he could not make Carbonneau amuse the audience, at least he might make this physician feel that the great ones of the earth, like the most insignificant of its citizens are all equal in the presence of justice, and that they must bow the head before the majesty of the law, impersonated by the presiding judge. The public would thus be shown what a distance there was between a magistrato and a physician, however celebrated the latter might be. Accordingly Dr. Carbonneau, who had entered the court amidst general curiosity, was allowed to remain for some five minutes waiting at the bar before the presiding judge, apparently engaged in speaking to one of his assessors, in giving orders to an usher, and in running through his notes, thought fit to speak to him.

At length, however, M. Hairies de la Freslonière condescended to look at the eminent physician. "Your name, your christian names, your age and profession," he said.

"Francis Carbonneau, member of the Academy of Medicine, seventy years of age."

"You have something interesting to say to the court."

"I think so," replied Carbonneau smiling in the direction of the jury. And he then began to explain how Claude had come to consult him concerning his wife's health.

"But," interrupted the presiding judge in the tone of a master scolding a refractory pupil, "it would appear from the necropsy that your diagnosis was a faulty one."

"How so?"

"Madame Claude was not at all ill. That point was demonstrated."

"The necropsy, or rather the experts' report, mentions a large heart with the left ventricle hypertrophied; the aorta moreover was affected, and the valves thickened. It seems to me that such is scarcely the heart to give to one's best friend. At all events, I was not mistaken when I announced an imperfectly defined complaint and—"

"Do you pretend then," interrupted the judge, who saw that Evette's theories were seriously threatened, "do you pretend then that Madame Claude died of a diseased heart?"

"I pretend nothing at all. On the contrary, I maintain that it is not known what she died of."

"It is not known! Then you don't know, so what can you have to say on the matter?"

"I can admit that I don't know, and it seems to me that this admission is not without importance for the gentlemen of the jury, who ought not to ignore—since they have to decide so difficult, so mysterious a question—that death, natural death, may take place without leaving any material traces whereby to detect its cause. This has been shown by examples, and many eminent men have admitted such to be the case."

The public prosecutor thought fit to protest against this theory. "Admit the impotence of science, doctor, if it pleases you to do so," said he, "but if science is powerless, the law, thank God, is not."

Carbonneau drew himself up to his full height, and throwing back his head, and shaking his long silvery locks with a movement of natural nobility and authority, which made more than one heart beat, he continued: "In such a case the law can only speak with certainty when it has heard the voice of science, but concerning the death of this unfortunate woman, the science of your experts has not told us everything. If the necropsy had been more carefully performed, no doubt we should know the causes of that death, whereas at present we do not know them." The presiding judge would have interrupted, but Car-

bonneau did not allow him to do so. "I will say if you will allow me," he continued, "that I, Carboneau, do not know them, and if I speak in that manner, gentlemen of the jury, believe me it is in all honesty. Fifty years of study give me the right to use this language. When a man's life and honour depend on a medical examination—for it is this examination which your verdict will confirm or impeach—it should be complete ; whereas the one presented to you is not."

The presiding judge and the public prosecutor would have protested together, but Carboneau continued his remarks, stating that the liver had not been examined, and that the brain had not be opened. He gave a full explanation of the causes of death, which might possibly have been found in those organs and then spoke as follows:—"The jury will consequently perceive that a complete examination was not made. The expert began by searching whether there were any traces of an ulcerous character, which the deceased's husband fancied was the cause of death. Not finding any, he at once jumped to the conclusion that this was a case of poisoning. His mind was not free when he approached the body ; assuredly he was influenced by the circumstances which had preceded Madame Claude's death ; with which circumstances he was fully acquainted. These circumstances were grave, I will admit it, and a case of poisoning might be suspected. Accordingly, the experts at once concluded that it *was* a case of poisoning. But then what was the poison ? It is not produced. Therefore, I say and I repeat it, that I, a doctor, don't know what caused Madame Claude's death. But in a case where a doctor can say nothing, a man may still express an opinion. Claude was my pupil. During several years I was able to appreciate his honesty, his disinterestedness, his upright character. I have had few young fellows under my control who have inspired me with as much interest and sympathy, and I consider him so utterly incapable of committing the crime with which he is charged, that although he is seated in that dock of infamy, I, his old master, who have remained his friend, offer him my hand." The gesture accompanied the words, and when the spectators saw Carboneau turn towards Claude with outstretched hands—Carboneau, that famous physician, respected throughout the world—a feeling of deep emotion spread through the court.

But the presiding judge was on the watch. When the spectators saw him lean forward as if to speak, their feeling of emotion gave way to one of curiosity.

"I pity Evette," said an advocate.

"Oh, the president won't be so imprudent as to assist in the defeat of the expert for the prosecution."

"But see Evette is already on his legs!"

"He's full of confidence, the beggar. Now, just you see. He'll prove to the jury that Carbonneau and he are of the same mind."

"That would be clever—in Carbonneau's presence too."

It was not, however, to Carbonneau that the presiding judge addressed himself, but to Mérault. "Has the defence any desire to ask for the witness's opinion on any other points?" he asked with an air of simplicity.

Mérault turned towards Claude. The latter rose, he was trembling, and yet, for the first time since the commencement of the trial his eyes had assumed an expression of proud assurance. "The jury will now understand," said he, "why I did not myself discuss the experts' evidence and reports."

"You were waiting for that testimony?" asked the presiding judge in a tone of disdainful irony.

"It was my supreme hope."

"And now?" enquired M. Hairies de la Freslonière.

"Now I have only to thank my venerated master. Whatever happens, my honour is safe."

The presiding judge could not allow such a remark to be made without condemning it. "The gentlemen of the jury," said he, in a sententious tone, "hold your honour in their hands, and it is they alone who can restore it to you—" he paused advisedly, "or take it from you for ever." Then, turning towards Carbonneau, he added, "You desire to withdraw, Carbonneau?" Carbonneau bowed.

The presiding judge looked at the public prosecutor, who replied that it was quite indifferent to him whether Dr. Carbonneau returned to Paris at once or not, for witnesses of this description had no weight in his eyes. In reality he wished to see the eminent physician take himself off as soon as possible; only it would have been dangerous to divulge the dread with which Carbonneau inspired him.

Mérault, on the other hand, would have liked to retain Claude's old master in Condé until the end of the trial, but Claude prevented his doing so. "It is not for us to inconvenience him," he said.

XIII.

Not merely was Carbonneau's evidence even more damaging for the prosecution than Vandam's, but it had also discontented the presiding judge, who in presence of the eminent physician's determined attitude had been unable to assert as he desired the supreme majesty of the law. He at least was tired of all this scientific testimony, even if the jury and the spectators were not. In real truth his natural ignorance of most medical matters did not allow him to control it as easily as he would have controlled ordinary evidence, and he had always objected to witnesses over whom he could not domineer.

A consolation was however in store for him. There stepped to the bar of the court an old peasant woman dressed out in her Sunday clothes, who advanced with a bewildered air, looking in every direction as if to find some means of escape in case she found herself in danger. Thanks to one of the ushers she was at length placed in front of the bar, and there every one could see her, hiding herself in her shawl, trying to take up as little room as possible, turning her eyes away from the president's red robe which frightened her, and curtsying in a terrified manner to the various people around her.

"Raise your hand !" exclaimed the presiding judge.

She would have liked not to do so, being perhaps afraid that her hand was going to be cut off ; but ultimately, on the usher pushing her by the elbow, she decided to obey the president's injunction.

M. Haires de la Freslonière next repeated the words of the oath. What the woman answered, however, no one heard.

"Say I swear it."

"Yes, I will."

"Say it then."

"I have said it."

"Say it again distinctly."

Distinctly indeed ! The spectators heard her say "bear," "tear," "rare," "dare," anything but "swear."

"Your name, your christian names, your age, your dwelling-place," continued the presiding judge.

Only a confused sound escaped her lips.

"What do you say ?"

"M'lanigot."

Instead of getting angry at this strange reply, the presiding judge appeared delighted. What! had he got hold of a funny witness after all? The spectators were already laughing, without precisely knowing why they did so, but probably because they had of late had so few occasions to indulge their risible faculties.

One of the ushers undertook to translate this mysterious "M'lanigot," and he did so as follows, "Mélanie Mignot, 68 years old, living at Bourlandais."

The presiding judge then turned towards Mérault. "The defence desires this good woman's evidence?" he asked with all apparent gaiety.

"Yes Monsieur le Président, and on a most important point."

"Ah, really, well, so much the better."

"I wish her to tell the gentlemen of the jury what she saw in the woods of La Rouvraye on the 24th of April last."

"Ah, you wish her to give us a narrative? Very good. Now, my good woman, will you tell us what you are asked."

She hesitated for some time, looking at the presiding judge with absolute terror and at Mérault with an air of profound reproach. At length, however, she seemingly made up her mind to plunge headfast over the precipice which presented itself.

"What I said, I said," quoth she, "it's true, I won't say it isn't."

"Will you tell us what you said?"

"Oh, I've said it already. Isn't that enough?"

It was necessary to persuade her, to compel her to say it over again, and when she had made up her mind to do so, it was equally difficult to get her to look at the jurymen. "But," said she, "it was that gentleman," pointing to Mérault—"who spoke to me; oughtn't I to answer him?"

"Undoubtedly, it was the advocate who questioned you," observed the presiding judge, "but you must give your answer to the jury."

This appeared to astonish the witness immensely; and she at first seemed to think that the presiding judge was poking fun at her. "Well, that day," she ultimately answered, "it was fine weather and I sent Pulchérie to cut some grass in the wood. Pulchérie, that's my grand-daughter, my boy's daughter whom I've brought up ever since her father's death—she's eighteen, a good little girl, but she's young, and then she's got such eyes—They're too much for her!"

"How many has she got then?" asked the presiding judge.

"Oh, she's only got two like every one else, but then they're too bright! So then she didn't come back. That set my brain boiling, three o'clock, four o'clock."

"What, all that while cutting a little grass?"

"Oh, it was too long. So I said to myself I'll just go and fetch her. So off I went. You know she's young—you understand. I'm not a fool. I daresay there might be no harm but it wouldn't do to let her talk with the lads in the wood. So I went down the path leading to the Grand Fayard, and then I took that of Les Buées. I didn't see her. I might have called for her but I didn't—I still went on. And just as I reached the fountain of Frère Robert I heard—Do you know what I heard?" The spectators tittered and even the judge himself smiled.

"Well this was what I heard," and the old woman imitated the sound of a kiss. "*Ah mon Dieu!*" said, I "I've come too late!" A roar of laughter interrupted her.

"Well," quoth old grandmother Mignot when she was able to resume her narrative. "Well, I won't say as you are wrong in laughing at me. I approached softly to look, I pushed back the branches and what do you think I saw? I saw that gentleman there—pointing to Claude—he was on his knees in front of his wife who was sitting down kissing his hands and saying, 'Oh! my Etienne how I love you!' Now, really, you know when I saw them like that I should never have believed that he was the sort of man to poison his wife!"

"Are you certain that you recognised Dr. Claude?" asked the presiding judge, anxious that the jury should not remain under the impression of those words—"Oh! my Etienne how I love you."

"Oh, I'm quite sure of it."

"You recognised him in spite of the branches? You already knew him?"

"Yes, and I recognised him that day—I recognised him to-day. I should recognise him in a hundred years."

"I hope you will. And your grand-daughter?"

"I didn't find her, and when I got home, she was already there. She told me that she had fallen asleep in the woods."

"I daresay she did. Well, you may sit down."

Mérault was desirous, however, that this testimony, which the presiding judge had tried to make as comic as possible, should not be thrown away. "The gentlemen of the jury,"

said he, "will remember this evidence. It shows in it's very simplicity what were the sentiments of the prisoner and his wife on that fatal day ; it shows, moreover, how they employed their time."

The procession of witnesses continued. Mérault had subpoenaed a large number who were to give evidence on the same point, namely, that Claude, instead of being the mercenary individual which the prosecution pretended, was, on the contrary, a man of devotion.

"Good gracious me," said the presiding judge, annoyed by the monotony of this testimony, "we are already acquainted with this devotion of his. The prisoner himself spoke to us about it. It is the sentiment which has guided him since infancy!"

Despite this banter, however, Mérault would not renounce calling his witnesses, especially Abbé Colombe, the senior curé of Hannebault. The worthy priest advanced quickly to the bar, so as not to keep the court waiting. A vivid blush suffused his features, and his eyes were turned towards the ground. His humble demeanour was in perfect keeping with his favourite phrase, "I am such a poor old man." He had himself written to Mérault, asking to give evidence on behalf of one whom he had known as a child in his parish.

What he had to say did not agree, so he told the jury, with certain statements in the act of accusation, but if it was not showing too much presumption he should like to enlighten the court on a matter which personally concerned the prisoner and himself. "When Dr. Claude arrived at Condé," he said, "he visited me, and with Christian charity he placed himself at my disposal for the sick poor of my parish. As he did not, however, wish to appear to compete with his colleagues, he suggested that I should pretend to pay him for his visits or his operations with any alms I might receive for the benefit of the sick. As will be understood, grave cases often present themselves in an industrial town like Hannebault, I therefore sent for Dr. Claude—he came and—(here the abbé blushed) I lent myself to his charitable deception. No one ever knew that he generously gave his learning, his time, and his trouble to the poor of Hannebault for nothing. To-day, however, I must acquaint you with his devotion and discretion. Oh, gentlemen of the jury, do not think that a man who does good in that manner, could, for the sake of lucre, be guilty of such a frightful crime as the one he is charged with."

"The court thanks you for your evidence, Monsieur le curé," said the presiding judge, "it is that of a saintly priest, whose charity every one appreciates."

The Abbé Colombe would have liked to escape this eulogium, he stepped backward as if to withdraw, then took a few paces forward again as if he had forgotten to say something; and finally retired raising his hand to his head with a gesture plainly signifying, "Oh, I am such a poor old man!"

XIV.

IN spite of the evidence given by Madame Mérault, by Vandam, by Carbonneau and the Abbé Colombe, in spite of Veronica's letter which Nathalie had communicated to the court, still Claude's situation did not improve. The public remained hostile; and few indeed were those who did not believe that the doctor's wife had been poisoned. Now, if she had been poisoned, who but her husband could be guilty? The circumstances under which her will had been made seemed to indicate his culpability beyond the shadow of a doubt.

As for the jurymen, who, being usually domiciled in the four corners of the department, were not under the influences of local prejudices, their opinions had fluctuated in the strangest manner. One day they would believe in the prisoner's innocence, on the next they felt convinced that he was guilty. As the trial proceeded, however, they inclined more and more towards this latter view of the case. No doubt there had been evidence in Claude's favour, but was not the testimony for the prosecution overwhelming. Truly Carbonneau had said, "I do not know what Madame Claude died of;" but then Evette had declared, "I swear that she died poisoned!" Amid the tangled contradictions with which the twelve high-minded citizens in the box had to deal—in presence of the medical imbroglio which they must unravel, despite their utter ignorance of chemistry and medicine, there was one voice that rang unceasingly in their ears—that of the presiding judge. *His* tone had never changed; it was evident that he firmly believed in the prisoner's guilt. None of the evidence which the defence had invoked had modified his conviction. Now, he was a skilful man whom others could not deceive, and, moreover, he was an honest man who would not deceive others. If doubt had assailed his mind

while the affair was proceeding, assuredly he would have shown it. If his tone continued so affirmative, it must be that his belief was unshaken. If it was so aggressive, it must be on account of the indignation with which this horrible crime inspired him. They, the jurymen, considered they must bear the presiding judge's attitude in mind, it could best enlighten them as to the course they had to follow when the time came for the verdict.

Nathalie, as the danger increased, threw her whole soul into Claude's defence. She had learnt from Beauvisage, the supplementary jurymen, whom she had won over to the prisoner's cause, that of the twelve men in the box there were several whose minds were not yet quite made up, who still hesitated as to the verdict they were to give. One of them had written to his brother, a provincial magistrate, to ask his advice, and the man of law had told him to abide by the result of the new experiments. A second jurymen, of a pious turn of mind, had acquainted his confessor with his perplexity. A third had declared that he would willingly give a hundred crowns not to have to decide either one way or the other. If he found the prisoner guilty, he would probably experience everlasting remorse; and if he found him innocent, he would remain tormented by the idea that he had possibly saved a monster from the guillotine. This fellow, according to Beauvisage, was the most moderate of the twelve, for those who did not speak, who kept their own counsel, had apparently long since formed their opinion—an opinion unfavourable to Claude.

How many then among the jurymen were irresolute? And, on the other hand, how many of them believed in the prisoner's guilt? To these terrible questions Nathalie could obtain no precise answer. And yet it was impossible that Claude could be condemned. An innocent man cannot be sent to the scaffold. Assuredly he would be set at liberty. If the jury were in doubt, they would give him the benefit of their doubt—they would find him not guilty, and then he would be saved!

This was how Nathalie reasoned during her long feverish nights. Since the beginning of the trial she seemed to have lived ten years of her life: she had suffered almost beyond human endurance. Ah! how mistaken she had been when she had said in her heart, "I shall feel no remorse!" The jealousy which had hardened her nature, which had armed her hand, existed no longer now that Veronica was dead. Whilst she was alive she had been her rival, her enemy; but now she seemed once more

her cousin, her friend, her sister. And yet she had murdered her ! How different were those two phrases, " I will kill," and " I have killed." Truly the tortures which Nathalie endured alone constituted a terrible expiation.

And this waiting for the finish, this waiting for the verdict, was it not fraught with intense suffering ? There was Claude struggling with the chain of evidence entwined around him, perspiring with anguish and impotence as the prosecution dealt him blow after blow—indeed, morally and physically overwhelmed. And yet one word from her and he would be able to shake off his bonds, one word and he would be free ; one word and his life would be no longer threatened. Ah, but then she must sacrifice herself, and worse than all relinquish all hope of love.

The new experts having finished their task now came to acquaint the court with its results. A single day had sufficed them, and no one among the public knew what conclusion they had arrived at. Had they, or had they not, discovered a sufficient quantity of digitalis to corroborate Vandam's theories ? When they entered the court all eyes were turned towards them, seeking in their faces an answer to this question, but these men of science wore an impenetrable mask.

" Gentlemen, are you agreed ?" asked the presiding judge, who always remained master of himself, even in the most critical situations. He put this question in the tone of a man who scarcely believes it possible for any two or three experts to arrive at one and the same opinion.

However—strange as he might consider it—his question was answered affirmatively. " Ah ! then," said he, " acquaint us with the result of your experiments." This remark was addressed to the one of the three experts who possessed most authority in the scientific world.

This happy individual was so glad to have an opportunity of playing a part in this *cause célèbre* that he gave his explanations at great length, pausing at intervals as if to admire his own elocution, and relating how his colleagues and himself had accomplished their task, how they had adopted Homolle's method (which he minutely described), with a few modifications suited to the circumstances, contenting themselves, moreover, with the substances Evette had preserved, and without exhuming the victim's body. Still, despite the great pleasure which this expert took in describing the method he and his fellows had followed, in recapitulating the case, and the precautions they

had taken, he could not go on in the same manner for ever; it was necessary to arrive at a conclusion. And the conclusion which he and his colleagues had come to entirely upset Vandam's system. The new experts had found traces of digitalis, but so slight, of such an infinitesimal character, that it was evident that the animals which Evette and Senelle had experimented on had not been killed by digitalis.

The presiding judge was profuse in the thanks which he addressed to the experts for the zeal and activity they had shown. He complimented them on their learning in flowery language, and then, before allowing them to withdraw, he ordered an usher to call the chemist Vandam "Have you heard these gentlemen's conclusions?" he asked in a tone of commiseration.

"Certainly."

"You recognise, I suppose, that they operated with all necessary care?"

"I suppose so."

"We must have no equivocation—do you recognise that fact or do you contest it?"

"I can neither recognise it nor contest it, since I was not present at their experiments."

"Ah! you would perhaps have liked the court to have chosen you as one of the experts?"

"Precisely, or rather I should have liked the prosecution and the defence to have selected the experts between them. They might have acted together."

"No doubt you would have operated better than these gentlemen. You would have given them the benefit of your advice. You would have enlightened them with the science of which you are the sole possessor."

"I should at all events have operated differently, and the different operations might then have been compared—"

"To your advantage?"

"Perhaps—"

"Will you take the trouble to tell these gentlemen how you would have operated?"

"I should have operated according to Stas and Otto's method. I don't contest the merits of Homolle's, but to give certain results, it needs to be practised by experienced hands, for if the benzine washings are not made with great precaution they suffice even when cold, to dissolve a certain quantity of the digitalis. The gentlemen of the jury will understand—"

"The gentlemen of the jury will understand," quickly interrupted the presiding judge, "that if the experts had resorted to Stas's method you would have criticised them for not employing Homolle's. Stas's method would then have had all the faults and Homolle's all the better qualities. The gentlemen of the jury will appreciate your system of discussion."

Vandam's master qualities were calm and self-possession. He did not attempt to answer the presiding judge's remarks, but went on with his phrase at the point where it had been interrupted, next engaging the experts in a debate concerning the quantity of digitalis that might have been dissolved by the benzine washings. But he noticed while he spoke that his words produced no effect upon the jury. The presiding judge's observation had borne its fruits. He was looked upon as a man who criticises for criticism's sake.

There were still a few more witnesses to be called for the defence. When they had been heard and when every one expected that M. Hairies de la Freslonière was going to invite the public prosecutor to address the jury, he created intense surprise by calling for Dr. Evette. Carbonneau was no longer in Condé. There was no fear of an encounter between him and the prosecution's medical adviser; there was no fear of the latter being defeated. On the contrary, it was most advisable that he should now resume all that the various experts, doctors, and chemists had said, setting all this apparent confusion in order, and while indicating the points which the jurymen should bear in mind, obliterating all those which it was advisable for them to forget.

This then was the task to which Evette applied all his skill and cunning—in contradiction of the illustrious *savant* who had proffered to a former pupil the support of his generous friendship! Ah, the gentlemen of the jury must not believe that! As for divergencies of opinion between them there were *none*, there never had been any, at least not one of the slightest importance. Of course, they did not express themselves in the same manner, and no one regretted this more than he, Evette. He could only console himself for this inferiority by the thought that there are masters whom one can never equal, whose eminence is even unapproachable. But, if one went to the bottom of things, setting scientific formularies on one side, what did they see then? A perfect agreement, a full communion of ideas. Professor Carbonneau had adopted a theoretical point of view; but he, Evette, had been obliged as an expert to consider

things in a purely practical sense. Such being the case, was it not natural that there should be an apparent—merely an apparent—dissimilarity in their views? Theoretically, Madame Claude's heart was not a perfect one; that was a certain fact. It was not a model to offer for a pupil's inspection. But practically this heart was an excellent one, so excellent that few hearts could equal it; for human nature is by no means perfection. And then such imperfections as the necropsy had revealed in this heart, had they not been caused by the poison, which, according to the prosecution, had been administered, experimented with, several times prior to death with the view of making it seem that the victim was afflicted with disease? It was in this style, and with equal confidence, that Evette replied to the charges of not having examined the liver and the brain. In truth this examination *had* taken place—not from a theoretical but from a practical point of view, that is, in the only sense that could have any importance for the cause of justice. Not a point that the defence might have invoked did Evette leave without reply. The criticisms to which his reports had been subjected had only sufficed to prove their worth.

"Thus," said the presiding judge, "you persist in your conviction?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Président—I am convinced that Madame Claude was poisoned, everything proves such to have been the case."

"What have you to answer in reply?" asked the presiding judge of Claude.

"My advocate alone is competent to deal with a piece of special pleading."

"I cannot but admire the fact," retorted M. Hairies de la Freslonière, "that in your position you are sufficiently at your ease to crack jokes!"

XV.

"WHY does the substitute speak after his master?" asked an advocate when M. Bassaget rose to speak when Evette had withdrawn from the bar, "I should not have thought the prosecution could have had anything more to add." He was, however, mistaken. The prosecution had a great deal more to add, and if what it added was not fresh, at all events it was apparently im-

portant since its leading exponent thought fit to speak for five long hours, so that, given M. Bassaget's notorious volubility, his address was one of most inordinate length. At one moment he had thought of speaking less rapidly than usual, in the hope that some of the reporters might take his speech down in short hand, but there was little chance of this ; for just now political questions were filling the newspapers, column after column being crowded with electoral addresses, party manifestoes, and reports of public meetings held in every corner of France. One was in fact on the eve of a general election, and prominent as the accounts of the "Affaire Claude" had been during the earlier days of the trial they were now relegated to the third page and ruthlessly cut down by bewildered sub-editors without the least regard to the context. So M. Bassaget had to abandon the hope which he had momentarily cherished, and the only consolation remaining to him was to astonish his audience by the facility and rapidity of his elocution.

He did astonish it. A journalist, who soon renounced all idea, even of briefly analysing this wonderful speech, occupied himself in calculating how fast the public prosecutor spoke, and after a lapse of four hours he came to the conclusion that he had already uttered from thirty-five to forty thousand words.

Forty thousand words ! Let us see to what use he turned them. What pain, he remarked, for him to be obliged to demand the conviction of a man occupying such a high social position as the prisoner, what pain to find himself, after these long sittings of the court in presence of a guilty criminal, when he had hoped—hoped with all his soul, that the evidence of each succeeding witness would indicate the prisoner's innocence, or at least inspire a doubt in his favour ! But alas ! all this evidence had been so overwhelming, that to-day he had not even to demonstrate the prisoner's guilt. Day by day, hour by hour, the conviction of this guilt had grown upon the gentlemen of the jury, so that he, the public prosecutor, had only a most simple and easy task to accomplish, that of briefly resuming the evidence, and indicating the salient points of the case.

These salient points were, in his opinion : Firstly, the public accusation directed against the prisoner even before the crime was committed ; the public clamour which had appealed to the officers of the law to secure the person of this guilty man. Secondly, the infernal skill with which the prisoner had prepared this crime—utilizing all the resources of a perverse science, in hopes of baffling the investigations alike of medicine, chemistry,

and justice. Thirdly, the audacity with which this crime was perpetrated, so soon after wringing a despoiling will from an unfortunate fascinated woman. Fourthly, the insolent assurance with which the prisoner had conducted his defence, basing it on an argument which was precisely one of the strongest weapons the prosecution possessed—namely, the non-discovery of the poison. For it was this non-discovery of the poison which proved that he, a skilful physician, was the poisoner, having utilized for the perpetration of his abominable crime some new poison with which science had not as yet experimented. Finally, M. Bassaget called attention to the diabolic strategy which he, the prisoner, had exhibited during the trial in obtaining, while powerless to say anything himself, the allied assistance of an obscure chemist, hungering after publicity, and of an illustrious physician, who, being misled by friendship, had still desired to protect a former pupil. Never before had such a singular combination been seen; on the one hand, the devotion of an old affectionate master, cruelly deceived; on the other hand, the complaisance of a worthless intriguer, an expert in the art of jugglery.

"I have finished, gentlemen of the jury," said M. Bassaget at the close of his long oration, "I might have appealed to your emotion and it would have been easy for me to provoke it, but I desired, without passion, without any excess of language, to appeal to your reason alone. I desired to convince you; and as I have not uttered a word which has been without its echo in your breasts, I have easily been able to complete what the evidence began. Indeed, I have merely demonstrated to you, perhaps in fuller light, what the evidence must have already shown you—that is, the prisoner's guilt, a certain evident guilt, of which no one to-day has a doubt. It is for you, gentlemen, to complete the work of the law and to make a memorable and terrible example. I will not say that there are many doctors who are disposed to rid themselves of their wives by means of poison, but those who do entertain such a project must learn that despite all their science, their crime will not remain unpunished. It is so easy a crime for them to commit that they must unceasingly have before their eyes, the warning which your verdict will carry, and the remembrance of the expiation which you will cause to be inflicted on the guilty man who sits in that dock before you!"

If M. Bassaget had gone too far in saying that no one now had a doubt concerning Claude's guilt, he had at all events only

overstepped the measure by an inch or two : for few indeed were those who at present entertained a belief in the prisoner's innocence. Accordingly, it was with profound surprise that the audience listened on the morrow to the opening phrases of Mérault's speech for the defence. "It is," said he, "a friend who rises to defend a man whom he esteems and whom he loves. It is on account of his being a friend that he was chosen as his advocate, otherwise, a more eloquent voice than his would awake the echoes of this hall. Therefore, gentlemen of the jury, you will understand how deep is my emotion when I weigh the responsibility I have assumed, and you will forgive me if my voice should tremble."

"Really, those advocates have every audacity," exclaimed one spectator, as he heard Mérault speak in the foregoing strain, while others remarked that it was very imprudent for Claude's counsel—a candidate at the forthcoming elections—to admit that he was a poisoner's friend.

Claude's innocence was as evident to Mérault as his guilt had been to the public prosecutor. His innocence was based both on a moral fact, and on a material fact. Firstly, a man does not poison the woman he loves. Secondly, to poison any one you need a poison.

Mérault proved that Claude loved his wife, and he then endeavoured to show that the poison he was charged with having administered had never existed. But if he succeeded in the first part of his task, which was comparatively easy, for he was sustained and inspired by his own souvenirs, he did not, however, achieve the same result in regard to the second part. He was able to reduce to their proper value the charges and the calumnies inspired by folly and jealousy, and he did so boldly, regardless of whom he wounded. He was able to point out the errors of the necropsy, to denounce the imprudent affirmations of the experts. He was able to avenge Vandam, and to show him such as he really was, a man of learning and integrity, sacrificing himself to friendship. He was able to invoke the authority of Carbonneau, and to insist upon its value. He was able to call upon the prosecution to show, or even to name the poison which had caused Veronica's death. He was able to argue that no one knew the cause of this death. But there were two points round which he turned and turned unceasingly, dealing with them ten times, twenty times, over and over again, but without managing to demolish, or even to shake the arguments of the prosecution, namely, the will and the

symptoms which, having preceded the victim's death, had also manifested themselves in all the subsequent physiological experiments.

As Mérault spoke far less rapidly than M. Bassaget, an entire sitting was taken up with his speech. But however skilful, however conscientious it was, it failed to create the effect which Claude's friends anticipated it would produce, and which it really deserved to have accomplished. This was so apparent that some of the spectators addicted to betting, who tried either to cover their previous bets, or to make fresh wagers, could find no one inclined to back "acquittal."

It was expected that the morrow's sitting would begin with the public prosecutor's reply; then would come the advocate's rejoinder, the summing up, and finally the verdict which would be given either in the evening or during the night. When the court re-assembled, however, the presiding judge first of all sent for Messrs. Evette and Senelle. "Gentlemen of the jury," he said, "we thought that you might perhaps have some questions to put to the experts, some additional information to ask them for." Then, seeing that the jurymen remained silent, he invited Dr. Evette to explain over again the symptoms which had preceded Madame Claude's death, together with those which had characterized the physiological experiments.

"How abominable," remarked a young advocate, "the defence ought to have the right of discussing the evidence."

"Don't you know," retorted a colleague, "that the Cour de Cassation has decided that evidence may be heard pending counsel's replies?"

It was not, however, mere evidence that Evette brought to the bar of the court, but a fresh speech for the prosecution, more terrible in its skilful moderation than the pompous, long-winded discourse delivered by M. Bassaget. If Mérault had been able on the day before to inspire the jurymen with any doubts, Evette now managed to obliterate them.

Then the public prosecutor continued on the same side; and ultimately Mérault was invited to speak for the last time. He did so during three hours, striving to infuse the sentiments which animated his own breast, into the hearts of the jurymen. When he had finished the presiding judge announced that the debates were closed and then in a loud sonorous voice, heard in every corner of the court, he commenced to deliver his summing up.

The journalist afflicted with numeromania, who had already computed M. Bassaget's speed of speech, was now able to

observe, watch in hand, that the two hours which M. Haires de la Freslonière devoted to his summing up, were divided as follows—firstly, an hour was consecrated to the case for the prosecution ; then a quarter of an hour was occupied in complimenting the experts and in alluding to their experiments ; ten minutes were allotted to the pulverisation of Dr. Carbonneau and the chemist Vandam ; half-an-hour to the arguments for the defence ; and finally five minutes to a little speech to the jurymen reminding them of their responsibility and of their duty towards society.

The presiding judge finally reached the question which the jury were to answer by their verdict, "Is Etienne Claude guilty or not guilty of having, during the year 1877, at Condé le Châtel, murdered his wife, Veronica, *née* Lerissel, by means of a poisonous substance capable of causing death ?" Next he reminded them of the formalities to be observed in voting, and the jury then withdrew from the court. They were all of them hale and hearty and there was no reason to require the services of M. Beauvisage, the supplementary jurymen.

While the presiding judge was concluding his summing up, the evening had gathered in and it was now quite dark. The few lamps and candles which had been brought to light the court imparted to the ancient hall a most lugubrious aspect. It seemed as if one were in a vast sepulchral vault of some strange Campo Santo. There were folks who, on beginning to speak aloud were frightened at the sound of their own voices, and continued their conversation in whispers, or even ceased to speak altogether.

Most of Claude's friends had left the court and assembled at Madame Mérault's. Nathalie alone had remained, seated by the side of Vandam on one of the benches allotted to witnesses. But she neither heard anything of what was being said around her, nor saw anything of what was going on.

After an adjournment of half an hour, the jury bell rang. The judges resumed their seats in the midst of a terrible, impressive silence. Addressing himself to the foreman, the presiding judge asked him to acquaint the court with the result of the jury's deliberation.

The foreman rose up, but it was some time before he could speak ; it seemed as if emotion paralysed his tongue. At length, in a trembling voice, he said : "On my honour and on my conscience, before God and man, the declaration of the jury is—Yes, the prisoner is GUILTY." The spectators waited, but the

foreman sat down without another word ; there were no attenuating circumstances.

Claude had been removed from court when the jury retired to consider their verdict. He was now brought back again by the gendarmes, and the clerk of the court read to him the declaration of the jury. Immediately afterwards the public prosecutor demanded that clause 302 of the penal code might be applied.

"Has the prisoner or his counsel," asked the presiding judge, "any reason to offer why sentence should not be pronounced according to law?"

Claude rose and turning his livid face towards the jury, exclaimed: "Oh, gentlemen, I pity you!"

"Speak to the court!" cried the presiding judge.

Without looking at the bench Claude sat down again. "I have nothing to say to the court," replied he.

After five minutes deliberation, the presiding judge pronounced in a firm voice the sentence of the law by which Etienne Claude, the convicted poisoner, was condemned to the penalty of DEATH.

XVI.

ON leaving the court, Claude was not conducted to the cell in which he had been confined since his arrest, but to the one specially reserved for criminals under sentence of death. It was so situated and so disposed as to preclude any attempt either at escape or suicide. It was only on entering this cell that Claude perceived that he had not been led in the usual direction, for he had walked without knowing that he walked, without seeing anything around him, without hearing any one of the words exchanged in his presence.

Three persons were waiting for Claude. The governor of the prison and two gaolers. By the light of a large lantern placed upon a stool, he perceived that one of these gaolers held in his hand a package consisting of some coarse textile material. Instinctively he glanced around him. He was in a vaulted apartment, the ceiling, walls and flooring of which were all in time-blackened stone. In one corner he noticed a small aperture garnished with a formidable grating, through which a faint ray of light probably filtered in the day-time. In another corner was a bedstead. In front of him was a table, and on this table a chain. This contemplation brought him back to

readily. "You were waiting for me," he said, "did you know then in advance?"

"We were bound to be prepared," replied the governor.

Whilst these words were being exchanged, the gaoler who carried the package which Claude had noticed, unfolded it:—It consisted of a strait-waistcoat—opening behind and having one long endless sleeve going from shoulder to shoulder.

"You know our orders," said the governor, as if to excuse himself.

Claude shuddered, but he made no signs of resistance. "Do your duty," he said, in a faint voice.

In Paris a criminal condemned to death has to put on the strait-waistcoat directly sentence has been passed upon him; and day and night he remains under the watch of attendants who dwell with him in his cell, accompany him to the waiting-room, whenever he receives a visit and assist him to eat, so that it is not necessary to remove the strait-waistcoat; he is, indeed, never lost sight of for one moment until the time arrives to hand him over to the executioner. In the provinces, however, where the number of gaolers is limited, the condemned man after being put into a strait-waistcoat usually has his legs secured to the wall of the cell by a chain of moderate length, and thus fastened he is left to himself—a gaoler inspecting the cell at more or less frequent intervals.

When Claude had taken off his upper garments he was at once put into the strait-waistcoat which one of the gaolers then began to lace up.

"If you feel cold," said the governor, "I will let you have a hospital cloak."

While the chain was being fastened, the sound of rapid footsteps was heard in the passage outside, and Mérault followed by an official carrying a lantern soon entered the cell, walking towards Claude with outstretched arms. "Oh, my friend, my poor friend!" he exclaimed.

Claude would have clasped Mérault to his heart, but the strait-waistcoat prevented his doing so. All he could do was to kiss him on either cheek.

"It was emotion that paralysed me," said Mérault. "If you have been condemned it is because you were badly defended."

Claude shook his head. "Your speech was admirable," he said, "never was I more conscious of my innocence than when I heard you speak; but you were pleading against fatality."

Mérault was not a mere advocate; he had been a magistrate;

he would probably soon be a deputy; and consequently the prison officials showed him more deference than they would have exhibited towards a simple barrister. The governor made a sign to his men and all of them except one gaoler left the apartment. As the authorities had granted Mèrault the extraordinary favour of allowing him to see the prisoner in his cell, it was as well to allow him a certain freedom of action, though on the other hand one must not lose sight of the fact that the culprit was a prisoner, and that he might poison himself if he could only get the chance.

"What you say," said Mèrault developing the idea which he had uppermost in his mind, "is a great consolation for me in my despair, but it is not enough to set my mind at rest."

"What then do you want?"

"I want you to sign this very evening your appeal to the Cour de Cassation."*

"I beg you, my dear Mèrault, don't speak to me about that. A fresh trial, perhaps fresh accusations, fresh struggles, emotions, hopes, and despair—fresh fever, exasperation and indignation. No, my friend, no. Ah, you do not know what relief I feel on thinking that it is now all over. Yes, indeed, what a relief. No more sight-seers observing me, no more experts overwhelming me, no judge any longer deriding me. It's finished. You cannot imagine what I felt during these long terrible sittings of the court, you will never be able to form an idea of the torture I endured when at the end of the day I returned to my cell, and during a sleepless night examined what had taken place and what I had said, what would take place on the morrow and what I ought then to answer. Now it is finished, accomplished—irreparably. I have no longer to think of the morrow. What better deliverance than death?"

"No, not that!"

"What does it matter? No longer to think, no longer to

* In France a criminal condemned to death has the right to appeal to the Cour de Cassation, or Supreme tribunal, for a new trial on the ground of legal informalities in the original proceedings. The mere fact of making this appeal without indication of the grounds on which it is made, stays execution until it has been heard; but should no legal informalities be proved on the day fixed by the Cour de Cassation to examine the matter, orders are given to carry out the sentence pronounced by the Assize Court. The appeal is, indeed, entirely of a technical character, and is in no wise directed against the verdict of the jury on the score that the latter is contrary to evidence. On this last point the reader will acquire further information in the final chapter of the story.—*Trans.*

remember, to sleep—to sleep that long night—astarless but also a dreamless one. Ah, my dear friend how weary I am!” Claude took a few steps up and down, but the chain and the strait-waist-coat impeded his movements, so he sat himself down on the bed. “There are some old men,” he continued, “who are so infirm, so miserable, that they pray for death to deliver them from their distress. Despite my thirty years, I am older than any of them for I know that I have not forty days to live. And yet these forty days frighten me. What shall I do while they last? I wish it were for to-morrow. And then you ask me to sign my appeal to the Cour de Cassation. But even if it were taken into consideration, even if I appeared before other jury-men who acquitted me, what should I do with my life? Where could I live? For what should I live? Horror-struck by the past, disgusted with the present, without a future, you yourself, must feel, my friend, that I cannot, I mean, that I could not live.”

“But honour!”

Claude turned away his head and for an interval he seemed quite overwhelmed. “After all I have suffered this day and during these later times,” he ultimately said, “that word is a painful one.”

“My friend!”

“Oh, I don’t reproach you for having uttered it. I know what were your motives; friendship, devotion, duty, still you might have spared my troubled mind. Honour, indeed! Ah, I shall leave behind me a dishonoured name—the name of a murderer, of a poisoner!”

He abruptly rose, but not having his arms to maintain him in equilibrium he almost fell. “Ah, do not think,” he said, “do not think that I am indifferent to that thought. To say the truth, it was that which sustained me during this trial. Twenty times was I on the point of throwing up my cause, of letting things follow their own course, but the thought of honour prevented my doing so.” Then, seeing that Mèrault looked at him with surprise he continued:—“You did not notice these moments of discouragement. You often thought me strong when I was weak. I concealed the truth from you when I saw how you devoted yourself to my cause, I did not want to damp your courage. You might have grown apprehensive, and for yourself as much as for me it was better you should retain a certain hope. But for myself I lost all hopes after the first few days. After Evette gave his evidence, I saw that the jury had

made up their minds. While the jurymen were trying to ascertain by the expression of my features what impression the evidence of the witnesses produced upon me, I on my side tried to read on their faces what impression it made on them. I do not know if they read my face wrongly, but I am sure that for myself I made no mistake. I was condemned beforehand. Nothing could save me, no one, neither Vandam nor Carbonneau in whom at one moment I had had such hope, neither my poor Veronica's letter nor your address."

"It is precisely for that reason that I ask you to sign your appeal. You were judged by a jury pre-disposed against you, we will have fresh experts and a fresh presiding judge."

"And it will be the same thing over again. Can you promise me that I should be treated as if I were innocent? neither the jury nor the experts nor the presiding judge, new or old ones, would ever admit that I was innocent. A miracle alone could effect such a transformation. My poor wife's death occurred under such extraordinary, inexplicable circumstances, with such grave symptoms, that had I been a jurymen myself I should, perhaps, have returned the same verdict as has been returned against me."

Mérault gave Claude a long look, seeking to divine what hidden meaning these words might conceal. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Nothing, nothing. Don't let us talk either of the past or of the future. Leave me to the repose of the present. I am crushed, broken both in body and mind."

"Claude, another word—it is in view of setting my own mind at rest that I speak. Can I ever rest if I remain with the remorse of not having done everything to save you? And I have not done everything that might have been done, my own conscience tells me so. Be it emotion or impotence, I did not defend you adequately. You will reflect on that point."

"I should so much have liked not to reflect."

"I shall see you to-morrow"

"Yes, to-morrow, and once again thanks." As he spoke these last words, he would have grasped Mérault's hand, but the strait-waistcoat prevented his doing so.

When Mérault had left the cell, Claude remained seated on the bed and was only roused from his meditation by the gaoler who had been present at the interview, standing motionless beside the door.

"Won't you take anything to eat, sir?" asked this official.

Claude looked up. "Ah yes, it's time," he said, "I'm thirsty. I should like something to drink."

"And what will you have to eat?"

"Oh, give me whatever you like."

The gaoler took up the lantern and left the cell, barring and bolting the door as he did so. After a short interval he returned with one of his comrades who carried a basket, the contents of which were emptied on to the table.

Claude rose from the bed and moved forward. But he had not yet grown accustomed to the strait-waiscoat, and when he would have taken hold of a glass to fill it with water, he discovered that he was powerless to do so.

"I will help you to eat," said one of the gaolers perceiving his embarrassment.

"But first of all pour out a glass of water please."

The gaoler immediately complied, and held the glass to Claude's lips.

XVII.

DESPITE the strait-waistcoat, Claude began by passing the best night he had had since the beginning of the trial. His mind had grown calmer since he knew the verdict. He experienced, as he had said, a vague feeling of relief. It was only towards daybreak that he awoke, and he would probably have slept some hours longer, had not his limbs been paralysed by the strait-waistcoat and the chain. He rose with the view of making his blood circulate, but he was not free to walk and move about as he desired, indeed as he needed to. If the dawn was beginning to light up the outside world, his cell still remained plunged in darkness, so that he knocked and stumbled against the table, the bed, and the walls without being able to protect himself with his hands.

Strait-waistcoat and chain alike exasperated him. He returned to the bed and sat down again, trying to assume a position in which, without too much suffering, he might manage to wait for daylight; but immobility proved as irritating as hampered locomotion.

If the strait-waistcoat cruelly tortures the madman who is put into it, it is calculated to inflict even greater suffering on a sane being. A madman's sensibility, like a drunkard's, may be

in a certain measure paralysed, but a man in Claude's position, feverish and excited as he was, is naturally extremely sensitive. Not merely however was he to contend with the moral torture, which the thought of approaching execution fosters, but the law inflicts upon him a physical torture—the strait-waistcoat which virtually deprives him of rest, whereby he might at least experience a few moments of forgetfulness. And this physical torture may last during forty or fifty days ; now is this humane ?

At last a faint streak of light gleamed through the aperture in the wall which Claude had perceived on entering the cell. This streak of light gradually expanded, morning was at hand. He was soon able to distinguish the few objects around him, and managed to walk with comparative ease. The noise of his footsteps attracted the attention of a gaoler. A little peep-hole in the door of the cell was opened, the light of a lantern streamed into the dungeon. A stern faced man glanced at Claude for a moment, and then retired, closing the peep-hole as he did so, and without uttering a single word.

A few hours afterwards a gaoler came to inform him that a visitor wished to speak with him. Claude at once allowed himself to be conducted to the waiting-room. This waiting-room was cut in two by a grated partition; behind the iron rails Claude perceived a woman in mourning, and this woman was Nathalie. When she saw him approach, walking slowly, his arms encased in the long endless sleeve of the strait-waistcoat, she gave vent to a stifled cry, and hid her face with both hands, her gesture being as expressive of horror as of pity.

A gaoler was standing in that part of the waiting room to which she had been admitted. A second gaoler accompanied Claude. It was in presence of these two men that they were to see and speak with each other. Having taken her hands from her face, Nathalie remained with her eyes fixed on Claude, being still unable to speak, and well nigh suffocated with emotion.

"I was deeply touched," said Claude, "by the zeal you showed in my defence, I asked Mérault to express to you how grateful I felt."

"Was it not natural," she murmured, "did you think that I should act otherwise?"

"No."

“Unfortunately, it was not mere zeal that was necessary ; but what we did not do, we *will* do—we will save you, for you

will not persist I am sure in the resolution with which you acquainted M. Mérault?" Claude nodded his head, as much as to say, that such was his intention. "Oh, it is impossible," she cried, "You will not inflict such grief on those who love you"—she corrected herself—"on your friends. You will let yourself be saved for their sake—I swear that we will save you." She joined her hands together and gave him a yearning passionate glance—as in the old time when they were lovers. But on perceiving that Claude's eyes did not answer hers, she strove to alleviate this manifestation of her feelings, which in truth had escaped her against her wish.

"It appears," she said, "that there are several reasons to invoke for the appeal, and it is even said, that M. Haires de la Freslonière is just the man to have purposely perpetrated some informality."

"Oh, that's nonsense."

"Not at all. He certainly did all he could to get the jury to convict you. But precisely to compensate for all his zeal and activity, he is the very man to perpetrate an informality—something difficult to detect, but which your counsel may discover if they are skilful men. It is quite in keeping with his character. With one hand he throws you overboard, while with the other he offers you a life belt. By this means, no matter what may happen, his conscience is always at rest."

As the two gaolers heard these words they glanced at each other indignantly—what an idea! The president of the assize court! It was impossible! But it was their duty to remain mute; they had no right to interrupt, they had orders to utilize their ears and arms, but not their tongues.

"And to think," continued Nathalie, "that you refuse to appeal, when things are like that—when the Cour de Cassation is certain to order a new trial; when it is quite as certain that another jury would acquit you—for the jury that tried you was worked upon by your adversaries—why, it's equivalent to committing suicide!"

"Well, even supposing it was."

An exclamation rose to Nathalie's lips, but she restrained herself. It was as a friend, and solely as a friend, that she could speak to him; friendly sentiments were the only ones to which she ought to give expression. The time had not come for her to unburden her heart; in fact, she must control herself, and avoid any premature revelation of her persistent love.

"Why should I care for life now?" asked Claude. "Do you think it would be agreeable for me to live?"

"Why? I don't know, though I think it would be easy for me to find good reasons why you shouldn't despair. But if I can't say at this moment *why* you should live I know *who* you should live for. For your friends—your friends whom your resolution would drive to despair, if you persisted in keeping it. It is not for me to speak of myself. I will say nothing of the grief you would cause me, though you know how—But no—let me only speak of your friends, Mèrault and Vandam. When M. Mèrault came home last night after leaving you, we were all together at his house anxiously waiting for his return, to know how he had found you; but none of us had ever dreamed of what he told us. Ah, I am sure that if you had seen his grief, and if you had seen your friend Vandam's grief, you would have signed your appeal on the spot. MM. Mèrault and Vandam are convinced that if you have been condemned, it is because they defended you badly. If you persist in your refusal, they will remain charged with the responsibility of your death, a responsibility from which nothing will ever deliver them, for which nothing will ever console them. Will you leave them that remorse? Do you think they deserve that reward?"

Nathalie had spoken with great warmth, without paying any attention to the gaolers who were listening to her, whom she had, in fact, quite forgotten, being led away by her emotion, and only having eyes for Claude. When she had finished, Claude remained silent, but Nathalie felt that her words had produced some impression on him.

Early that morning, while seated on his bed, he had reflected over the matter as Mèrault had asked him to do; but his reflections, coming at a moment when the strait-waistcoat and the chain were causing him such violent exasperation, had failed to shake his resolution. It was better not to live. It was already horrible enough to think that he must endure physical and mental torture for several days longer, without exposing himself once more to all the sufferings he had already undergone. Besides, a man's life belongs to himself, not to his friends. He alone ought to decide it, in the sense that suits him. But Nathalie's mention of the reward which Vandam and Mèrault deserved for all the efforts they had made on his behalf, had deeply touched his heart. He forgot himself to think of them—Vandam, the friend of his youth, the comrade who had left everything to come and defend him—Mèrault who

had displayed such zeal, such ardour, such courage, and who had perhaps compromised the success of his candidature by so proudly declaring that he was his friend. Did he owe them nothing more than the passing gratitude of a few days?

"Besides," resumed Nathalie, "they will come to see you together this morning. No doubt they will speak more to the point than I have done, and they will find decisive reasons for you to abandon this resolution, taken in a moment of despair. For myself, I will only say one word—that, once acquitted—and another jury will assuredly acquit you—your life will not be so empty as you seem to fear. Be assured that—"

Nathalie stopped short, however, for at this moment the waiting-room door opened, and Mérault entered, followed by Denise and Vandam. Madame Gillet at once drew back, so that the newcomers might approach the grating.

After exchanging some preliminary words, Claude proceeded to assure Vandam of his heartfelt gratitude. But the chemist raised his hand to prevent him from continuing, "Don't let us talk of what is past," he said, "I did what I could, but have you no longer any confidence in me that you won't allow me to do anything more?"

At this point, Denise intervened. "You do not wish," she said, "that we should be able to talk of *her* together?"

Without giving them a direct reply, Claude turned towards Mérault. "What are the formalities for this appeal?" he asked.

"Ah! my dear Claude," exclaimed Vandam.

The two women did not speak, but they clasped each other's hands, and the tears trickled down Denise's cheeks.

"I give way in presence of your friendship," said Claude, "forgive me for having grieved you." Then, being desirous of mastering the emotion that was gaining upon him, he added with a smile. "Merely to take one's right hand out of these sleeves, to give it a moment's liberty, one would sign all the appeals in the world. Unfortunately, one can't be signing all day long."

"We will get them to relieve you of that horrible strait-waistcoat," exclaimed Nathalie.

"I see you are all disposed to do a great many things for me, but I doubt whether you will succeed—I mean as regards this odious strait-waistcoat."

XVIII.

EITHER President Hairies de la Freslonière had made a mistake, or people were at fault concerning him, for it was very difficult to find any informality in the recent proceedings of a nature to warrant a new trial. Only after a most patient examination did Méréault and his friends manage to discover three little irregularities of so slight a character that it was scarcely likely that the Cour de Cassation would take them into account. One of them, perhaps, might possibly be entertained, but the probabilities were that the Supreme Tribunal would not give it any more consideration than the other two.

Nathalie, who had left Condé and established herself in Paris on the day when the documents connected with the case were forwarded to the Cour de Cassation, was overwhelmed on learning these tidings. What was she to do? She thought of setting in motion all those of her friends and acquaintances who might possibly be able to influence the result, but she soon perceived that her trouble would be thrown away.

Méréault, now elected deputy, reached Paris a few days before the matter came on for hearing, but, despite his new-born parliamentary position, despite his connections in the judicial world, he could scarcely dispose of any more influence than Nathalie. The appeal was rejected.

Despite the evidence arrayed against Claude during the trial at the assizes, Nathalie had believed in his acquittal; despite the warnings that had been given her, she had believed that the Cour de Cassation would entertain his appeal. Nothing could dispel her obstinate faith and persistent hope. But now, what could she hope? Truly pardon was still possible, it was even almost certain that it would be granted; but pardon is not acquittal. Claude would always remain a condemned criminal, for the pardon that one grants a murderer is not entire—it merely implies imprisonment or transportation in lieu of death. Well, she would follow him to the scene of his transportation, she would consecrate herself entirely to him, she would attend as far as possible to his comfort, she would see him every day, she would love him, and he would be obliged to love her. No doubt this was not what she had desired; but so long as he was hers, what did it matter? That point secured, the rest would be as nothing.

It was impossible for him not to be touched by the apparent sacrifice she would make, by leaving everything else to follow him. Accordingly she now showed the same ardour in soliciting his pardon as she had displayed in seeking to obtain his acquittal from the jury of the assize court, and in striving to secure a favourable decision regarding his appeal.

She was not alone in these new endeavours—Mérault and Carbonneau were both exerting themselves with the same object in view. In this respect, Mérault's position as a deputy placed at his disposal an influence which he had not possessed a few weeks previously. Carbonneau, moreover, either by himself or by his friends, could obtain a hearing from the highest functionaries. The cause they pleaded was not the cause of humanity, but that of justice. They did not sue for the life of a young, intelligent man, worthy of interest and pity ; they asked for that of an innocent victim. But in a case of this kind it is customary to consult the prosecution office of the department in which the case has been tried—the office being required to furnish a report, containing full information concerning the prisoner and the circumstances which led to his condemnation. Accordingly, whenever Mérault and Carbonneau went, they were referred to a report, drawn up in the first instance by M. Bassaget and copied out by the procureur-general.

“ Dr. Claude innocent ! ” exclaimed those to whom the great physician and the advocate-deputy applied, “ why, he is one of the most dangerous criminals that ever appeared before an assize court ! The most odious circumstances accompanied his crime. The facts were patent, and his guilt is evident ; he is deserving of so little interest, that out of twelve jurymen there are only three who second your appeal.”

And then in addition, there was a terrible charge to be brought against this Dr. Claude, his affair had not remained a mere personal question, it had become a general one, affecting society at large, and even the state. A great sensation had been caused by the trial. People had been struck by the experts' predominating rôle, and their conduct had been warmly criticised. Articles had appeared in the newspapers, in the legal and scientific reviews, in which the system of identifying the experts with the prosecution had been strongly blamed. It had been established that in a trial for poisoning, it is not the incompetent jury which judges the affair, but in reality the expert, who speaks in the name of science or rather of his own science. Next, an inquiry had been instituted concerning the attain-

ments of these experts, frequently chosen by mere favour, and always without the co-operation of the defence. Then returning to the case in point, it was remarked how strangely the experts had acted. Instead of abiding by positive facts they had started with a series of suppositions. They had transformed a negative into an affirmative; their conclusions not being based on facts but on their personal opinions. All this had created a great stir, and it was not merely Dr. Claude who was in question but the whole system of medico-legal experiments. Claude's reprieve would indeed be equivalent to the condemnation of all the experts. Then there would be an end to justice. As it was, cases of poisoning were already difficult enough to deal with and the critics simply wanted to reduce the law to impotency. Their arguments threatened the very basis of society.

Nathalie did not care a fig for the basis of society; it was all the same to her whether it was strengthened or whether it crumbled away. She only desired one thing—her cousin's pardon. He had been unjustly convicted. Were they going to let an innocent man be executed? This was a far more important question in her eyes than to know whether one would be able to find any experts for future cases of poisoning. Mérault and Carboneau, however, were obliged to discuss the matter, the one from a legal, the other from a scientific point of view. When they wished to go into the question fully with the object of overcoming the resistance they encountered, they generally received the same answer, "It's a very grave matter," and this was about the only reply they could get. They were avoided as a couple of bores afflicted with a disagreeable hobby. Defenders of Dr. Claude, indeed! They were making themselves ridiculous. "Mérault looks a nice enough fellow," said some of his parliamentary colleagues, "but he's devilish annoying with his Dr. Claude. We have something else to do than to occupy ourselves with Dr. Claude. What would become of the Chamber if all the deputies who are advocates were to plague us with appeals in favour of their clients." But Mérault did not allow himself to be cast down. He pursued his task with unabated ardour. If at times the thought occurred to him that perhaps he might not succeed, he banished it at once from his mind. It was impossible! What, execute Claude? Claude who was innocent? Claude whom he ought to have saved? No, it could not, it should not be.

Without neglecting to utilize general influences, Nathalie

thought it would be as well for her to obtain personal interviews with the higher officials of the ministry of justice. She would plead Claude's case so eloquently, so persuasively, it would be impossible to refuse her what she asked. At first various audiences were promised to her ; but she was soon informed that they could not be granted. It was in vain that she begged and prayed. She met with refusals on every side.

She was told, however, that providing she renounced her design Mèrault should be received. Indeed, it would be prudent for her not to compromise the possible success of Mèrault's application by an obstinate persistency, which might offend those who were in a position to grant the boon she sued for.

For the first time for many long weeks, Nathalie despaired of success. All her successive combinations had fallen, one after the other, to the ground, and she remained as if crushed beneath their weight. Would Mèrault be listened to ? Doubt, horrible doubt, had taken the place of obstinate confidence. Now she was ready to admit that the execution was possible, indeed, that it was imminent, for she knew that after the appeal to the Cour de Cassation but little time elapses before the sentence of the law is carried out. The question of pardon is resolved in the course of a few days. Repulsed on all sides, utterly powerless, she had nothing more to do in Paris. It was best, that she should at once return to Condé. She accordingly decided to start without waiting for the result of Mèrault's final application.

Before, leaving, however, she called upon the advocate who on the next day would be allowed to plead Claude's cause for the last time. "Will you succeed ?" she asked.

"I hope so."

"I also, I hoped—I hoped for his acquittal, I hoped that his appeal would be entertained, I hoped—I still hope for his reprieve. When shall you know whether you have succeeded or failed !"

"In a day or two. They have promised to let me know directly the final decision is taken by the president."

"And then ?"

"Then I shall leave at once for Condé."

"Will you send me a telegram directly you know the result ? Fear nothing. I won't deprive you of the joy of acquainting him yourself with the good news—if, indeed, it be good."

XIX.

As the train drew nigh to Condé, Nathalie perceived that the public interest in Claude's case was unabated, for at one of the stations three people got into the compartment she occupied and began conversing on this particular subject. As she was unknown to them, they exchanged their remarks with all freedom.

"So," said one, "he wouldn't see good Abbé Paulin?"

"Ah, it's a great pity. Abbé Paulin has two qualities which don't often go together—zeal and tact. His intervention might have effected a great deal. Claude might have confessed, and been prepared for death."

"It seems that Abbé Paulin was not the only priest who had that idea; but he wouldn't see any of them."

"Not the only one! I should think not. There were more than twenty who applied."

"So then it was that Abbé Colombe intervened."

"Ah, he consented to see *him*!"

"Still, that proves nothing at all. He couldn't do otherwise. After the evidence which Abbé Colombe gave in his favour he owed him a world of thanks."

"It would be a sad scandal if he died without repenting."

"Yes, abominable."

"Then the execution is certain?"

"What, would you have him pardoned? It would be equivalent to defying public opinion."

"But heaven and earth are being moved in his favour. What's his name is pleading his cause in Paris—Louis Mérault—our new deputy, a pretty choice for the electors to make, a man who declared that he is a poisoner's friend!"

Nathalie opened her lips with the view of taking up Claude's defence, but at the same moment it occurred to her that she might perhaps learn something by letting the conversation continue uninterrupted. Accordingly, she did not speak, but fixing her eyes on the passing landscape continued to listen attentively.

"Yes, indeed," continued one of the speakers, "and then there's that Madame Gillet, the victim's cousin. It's most extraordinary. You don't think their efforts will be successful?"

"Not at all. I know for certain that several magistrates would resign if Claude were pardoned."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, that's a fact. You understand the government can't brave the judicial authorities."

"Oh, no, the government's too weak for that."

"That's just why it's frightened of the public indignation."

"When will the execution take place?"

"Oh, it's expected every day."

"Shall you go and see it?"

"I hope to, if I am warned in time. In fact, that's why I'm going to Condé. When an execution takes place the mayor of the town is always informed in advance, he has various steps to take to ensure public order. So I'm going to call on M. Cordhomme, the mayor of Condé, with whom I am on capital terms, and I mean to ask him to send me a telegram directly he is warned. I shall also try to retain a window looking into the Place. I don't want to be hustled by the crowd."

"Ah! the crowd! Yes, indeed, every one will be there."

"There are people who have been on the look out for three days past."

"Well, one can understand their curiosity. It's such a long while since there was an execution in Condé."

"I know some folks who would fall ill if it didn't take place."

"Will the executioner use the new instrument?"

"No doubt."

"I hear that it has several improvements. I should very much like to see it."

"Well, you should come with me. Directly I hear from M. Cordhomme I will warn you. We'll sleep at Condé, and next morning, after the execution, I'll stand you a trout *à la crème* like you've never eaten before. What do you say to that?"

"Well, I won't say no."

The conversation was here interrupted by a loud whistle. The train was entering the station. Nathalie had endured positive martyrdom while this talk was going on, still it had acquainted her with one thing that might prove useful—namely, that notice of an execution is always given beforehand to the mayor of the town in which it is fixed to take place. She was in ignorance of that circumstance, for, when she married Dr. Gillet, the latter was no longer mayor of Condé. Of course, Mérault would acquaint her with the result of the appeal for pardon, but then he might be delayed, he might even be deceived, whereas by applying to M. Cordhomme, or rather to Lajardie, she would be certain to be forewarned in the event of no reprieve being granted.

On arriving at Condé, Nathalie desired to see Claude at once ; but rigorous orders had been given, and she was refused admission to the prison. She had to draw up a written application for the permit she required. Pending a reply, she went to call on Lajardie who received her most courteously, although during the trial she had abused him to his face for not saying all he could on Claude's behalf. Lajardie was, however, always disposed to forgive and forget when a pretty woman was in the case, and besides he was in this instance exceedingly curious to know whether Madame Gillet had succeeded in her efforts to obtain a reprieve. On his putting the question, Nathalie replied that Mérault was now taking the last steps.

"And he will succeed?"

"We hope so."

"It would be a great pity if he didn't. For myself I should feel excessively worried. Just fancy, a man—who was my friend, whom I brought to Condé—guillotined! What a humiliation!"

Nathalie felt highly indignant at this remark, but it was not the moment to provoke Lajardie, whose services she came to ask for. "Set yourself at rest," she said, "such will not be the case. Still, as it is necessary to foresee everything, even the worst, even what is impossible, I come to ask you to do me a favour in the event of the order for execution being given."

"But you said—"

"Still, supposing it were given. M. Cordhomme as mayor would then be informed. Promise to warn me as well."

"Certainly I will, but—"

"You will faithfully promise me?"

"I swear I will. You know well enough that I shall always be delighted to oblige you. Ah! if Claude had only listened to me when he first came to Condé, all these calamities would never have occurred. Do you know what I advised him?"

Nathalie had no desire to learn what his advice to Claude might have been, still as an answer was requisite, she pleaded complete ignorance on the subject.

"Well," resumed Lajardie, "I advised him to try and win you, acquainting him with your merits, telling him how charming you were—for that's the truth. I have always found you charming, and to be sincere my admiration, like your beauty, has always been on the increase. 'Pon my honour you grow more beautiful every day." Nathalie rose from her chair.

"What! you won't allow me to admire you?" continued Lajardie. "You won't let me tell you that I have always

admired you? Ah! if that unfortunate fellow had only listened to me." Nathalie walked towards the door. "What! you are going already?" Nathalie left the room.

Never before had she refused homage nor closed the mouth of those who expressed their admiration of her beauty. On the contrary, she had always encouraged, if not frankly, at least by an enigmatical smile, which, although it promised nothing precise, left a ray of hope in the suitor's heart. But Lajardie's compliments, uttered at such a moment, had thoroughly disgusted her. She was seized with the desire to answer each of his eulogistic words with an insult. Coward, scoundrel, hypocrite, false friend! And it was he who called Claude "that unfortunate fellow," he who was "humiliated," he, so self-conscious of his own importance, with whom everything succeeded; while Claude was in prison, condemned to death, spurned by every one.

She had been all but promised an authorisation to see Claude on the morrow, but when she presented herself to obtain it she was informed that it was impossible to give it to her. As she still possessed several influential friends she hoped to be able to overcome the difficulty which presented itself, but her friends' efforts, like her own, proved unavailing. She would eventually be allowed to see the condemned man, she was told, but not at present. There were formal orders from the chief prosecution department to refuse any applications that were made to visit him. So far as she herself was concerned, she might possibly get these orders countermanded by seeing the procureur-general, but how could she absent herself from Condé, when Mérault's telegram might arrive at any moment.

At length one of her friends consented to set out for the capital of the department with the view of obtaining the permit she needed, but she was full of apprehensions concerning the result of his mission, fearing that the authorities might play with him and put it off until it was too late. Meanwhile the days passed by. She no longer dared to leave her apartment, being in hourly expectation of Mérault's telegram. A footfall on the staircase filled her with alarm—it must be the telegraph messenger. All her energy, all her initiative seemed to have vanished. From morning till night she remained gazing out of the window, waiting in agony, and devoured by fever.

And meantime he also was waiting—in his prison. What did he know, what had he been told? He had formally declared that he did not desire a pardon. But if it were granted he would be powerless to refuse it. He might begin by complain-

ing, he might scold them all for the steps they had taken, but he would soon be reconciled to life. Besides, would she not be there to sustain and console him? She would make him love life by making him love her. He must still recollect the time when they loved each other. Her image must still linger in his heart.

But would the reprieve be granted? How agonising it was to wait. She would have done better to have remained in Paris, as then she would have known the truth.* What was she doing in Condé? Before the friend who had started off to obtain the permission for her to visit Claude returned, she received this note from Lajardie: "Alas, the order has arrived. It is for to-morrow."

Was it possible? No, it could not be—for Mèrault had not telegraphed. A few hours afterwards, however, his telegram came to hand. It was as follows:—"After a first audience, I desired to obtain a second one, hence delay in telegram. Shall be at Condé this evening. Am in despair."

Thus it was all over. There was no more hope. For a few instants Nathalie remained as if absolutely crushed, but suddenly she raised her head again. She knew what she had to do.

XX.

To tell the truth, Nathalie had made up her mind as to the course she would have to follow on the day when, the appeal having been rejected, the surmise occurred to her that a reprieve might also be refused. If this reprieve were refused, then she, not Claude, should die. She had allowed him to be condemned, but she would not allow him to be executed. Condemned, but reprieved, she would be able to live near him, and live for him. If not reprieved, all she had to do was to save him. Now she only possessed one means of saving him. She must confess her guilt and kill herself.

Weak whilst uncertain, cowardly whilst waiting, she was certain to be firm now that she had taken this resolution. The Lerissels were not afraid of suicide. When one has played a big game and lost it, it is necessary to pay, even should life be the stake. Accordingly, she *would* pay. But it was horrible to die without having seen him. She would have said nothing; she would not have betrayed herself; he would have guessed nothing; but she would have gazed on him for the last time.

This consolation was denied her. The edifice of her hopes had fallen to the ground. Everything she had counted on had failed her. Everything save strength ; that, however, should at least not fail her ; and as her time was limited, she would not allow herself to be gained over by useless irresolution. By hastening the execution of her design, she would, moreover, hasten the hour of his deliverance. He must not be allowed to fancy that his last hour was at hand. He must read "liberty" and "restored honour," not "death" and "dishonour," on M  rault's features when the latter presented himself at the prison. M  rault would reach Cond   at five o'clock ; when he arrived, it must all be over. She had a few hours before her to prepare for death. They would suffice. It was useless for her to prolong her agony ; the sooner she died the better.

She shut herself up in her bedroom, and seated herself at the table in front of a blotting pad. For a few minutes she rested her head on her hands, meditating over what she was going to write. Then, firmly grasping her pen, she began as follows :—

"And you doubted the sincerity of my love ! Now, however, you shall learn its depth. When I came to you as a suppliant, when I dragged myself at your feet begging you to spare me and not to make *her* your wife, I felt already that if you rejected my appeal, I should be impelled to take some terrible resolution. I did everything to turn you from your purpose. I prayed and I threatened. But in prayer and threat alike I only desired your happiness—that was all I looked for—and it seemed as if I held it in my hands : remember the happy days we passed together.

"And you thought that after your jealous vengeance I should consider myself utterly forgotten—that I should remain without hope of ever rekindling in your heart the love which burned in mine ! What an error ! Why did you not listen to me when I repeated that you were the passion of my life ? You knew that mine was a violent, resolute nature, and yet you were able to think that when I saw myself abandoned, sacrificed, I should forget my love ; you believed that I could resign myself to hearing you speak to her as you had spoken to me, to seeing your eyes look into hers as they had looked into mine. You thought that I should not recollect that those same eyes had beamed on me ; that that same voice had filled my heart with joy. If I did not with my own hands strangle her in your presence, it was because I would not create a terrible abyss between us.

"Had I not the right to defend myself ? What right had

she to come and take away my happiness—to break my life making it miserable and solitary? If I resigned myself to such a fate, was I not for ever separated from you—from you, my God? Then what remained to me? Into whose arms could I throw myself? To whom could I cry aloud in my grief? Had I a mother, a family, a child? It was necessary to win you back. What mattered the means to me? I did not see her whom it was necessary to sacrifice. I saw you alone; you whom I loved.

“Ah, I can raise my head proudly. I was not actuated by base jealousy or by mercenary motives. I defended what was mine. I defended my life! And I did so with an object before my eyes; for it was my ambition to become what she was, and more than she was—an indispensable being, your refuge in hours of grief, your supreme consolation. But the edifice of my hopes has fallen, and I am crushed beneath its ruins. And yet, dire as is our common fate, I can at least raise my brow radiant with triumphant pride, for I am going to proclaim your innocence: I am going to save you!”

For the first time, Nathalie paused in the composition of this letter, written without reflection, but under the dictation of a throbbing heart. She was carried away with enthusiasm. It was long since she had felt such joy. She was giving her life for his. But her pause was only momentary. She had no time to think, no matter whether her reflections were bitter or agreeable ones. She carried her pen to paper once more:—

“What I am going to do is solely to save you. I have not, I swear to you, any other motive, and I do not reflect whether in acting thus I may or may not induce you to respect my memory or to think of me without too terrible a hatred. None of these mean calculations are mine. If I once did think of myself, I now only think of you. All for you, and for you only.

“In a day of justice, you will understand, I trust, that what I did, however hideous it may appear to calm minds unacquainted with passion, was what few women would have dared to do; and you will feel that, having an honest heart, I needed a powerful love and a bold mind to entertain such a design. Do you think that another woman would have loved you sufficiently well to commit such a crime. Would *she*, unfortunate being, have fought for her husband as I fought for my lover? But if I had more love and more strength than her, yet she was most blest, for she died in your arms.

“I—I am going to die far from you, with nothing else to nerve me than the glorious thought of having given my life in

the hope of winning you, of winning you to love you, to worship you, to make you happy, to sacrifice myself to you. I shall die almost peacefully. I know you will never love again ; and I find a consolation in my religious faith at thinking that, however severely God may judge and punish me, my soul may yet wander back to you upon this earth, following, accompanying you everywhere, animating your mind, consoling you, inspiring you, and loving you still.

“ When I formed this resolution I wished to arrange matters so that my letter should reach you before I expired. At the moment when I closed my eyes, never to open them again, our thoughts would have met. At the moment when you would have held this letter in your hands, and asked yourself—in spite of yourself perhaps—‘ Is she still alive ? ’ at that moment my lips would have uttered your name, and thus we should have separated. But that joy, like all my other hopes, is denied me. Before thinking of myself I must think of you. For the sake of assuring myself a consolation I must not expose you to a pang. You have already suffered too deeply, through me. Time presses, and this letter must not be delivered too late. It is another sacrifice for me to make, and not the least painful of them all.

“ Adieu—perhaps we may meet hereafter. The last words that I shall write, will be upon my lips as long as I have breath : ‘ I love you. ’ ”

Nathalie stopped writing. What more need she say ? Did not that final phrase resume everything—her life and her death, what she had done and what she was about to do ? That this fact might impress Claude was now her only hope ; she had no other wish to gratify. No doubt at first he would give himself up entirely to indignation ; but later on, when he grew calmer, he would feel how madly he had been loved, loved to such a point as crime, loved till death, and it was impossible that he could not be touched by so great a passion.

It would only be natural in the earlier times for him to think of Veronica, to pity her, and weep for her ; but little by little his tears would cease to flow. His grief would tire him. If at first the crime inspired him with horror, by and bye he would look into the circumstances under which it had been committed, and then he would find himself face to face with the mighty love, which had inspired the design, and carried it into execution without weakness. “ How she loved me ! ” That is what he would be obliged to say in spite of himself.

And then whose memory would remain uppermost in his heart—Veronica's or hers? In whose favour would he establish a comparison? Who would have loved him the most? Would not his last, like his first days, be hers? She would banish Veronica from his recollection, as she had banished her from his life.

XXI.

HOWEVER gratifying these thoughts might be, Nathalie could not afford to dwell upon them. It was necessary to act without loss of time. She had not merely to write to Claude, she must also publicly, solemnly admit her guilt and confess her crime. As this confession would be the only proof of Claude's innocence it must be precise, and present all the aspects of authenticity. In writing to Claude she had allowed her heart to speak; in writing to the public prosecutor she must banish her emotion and be guided by her mind alone. She sat down again before her table and proceeded as follows to indite her confession:—

“Sir,—By prosecuting Doctor Claude you have caused an innocent man to be condemned. He did not poison his wife; you acted wrongly in not believing him. It is true that Madame Claude was poisoned, but I, not her husband, am guilty. I make this declaration less with the object of sparing you a crime than with that of saving an innocent man. I trust that you will give it all due attention; but knowing your respect for the decisions of the law, I think it my duty to enter into precise details. My explanations will deal with the two principal points—Why I poisoned my cousin, and how I poisoned her.”

Here Nathalie paused, for she neither desired, nor could she tell the whole truth, and it was necessary to arrange her narrative so that it would present all outward signs of veracity, and especially in such a manner that the authorities would content themselves with her avowals without seeing any further. She could not resign herself to the idea of publicly owning her love, she could not confess the jealousy which Claude's desertion had awakened in her heart. Besides, she felt that a full confession might be interpreted wrongly—that it might in a certain measure compromise Claude and even lead to his being accused of complicity in her crime. After a few minutes' reflection, she continued as follows:—

“As you rightly remarked during Dr. Claude's trial, there was a time when I considered my cousin's fortune as belonging to myself. I had acquired the habit of managing her revenues and living on them. From what the doctors told me I thought that my cousin was afflicted with a mortal disease. Now, I was her natural heir, and being accustomed to a position which my modest income would not have allowed me to keep up after my husband's death, I felt the need of acquiring her fortune—which I repeat (this point must be well understood) I looked upon as my own, expecting to inherit it one day or another.

“I was thunderstruck when my cousin announced to me her marriage with Doctor Claude. I did everything I could to prevent this marriage ; but did not succeed. I have told you that I had thought she was afflicted with a mortal disease, and that such *was* my belief was shown during the trial. This conviction gave me the idea of poisoning her. Since she was not destined to live, what did it matter whether she died a few days sooner or later? However, I did not immediately carry out my design, for if she suddenly died, at the moment when I was threatened with the loss of her fortune, every one would have suspected that it was I who had administered the poison. But, on the other hand, I took all my precautions so that despite the marriage, I should not lose this fortune, and by acting on Mademoiselle Pélagie Lerissel, our cousin, I was able to prevent Veronica from alienating any part of her property in the marriage contract. On this point you may have the testimony of Mademoiselle Aveine, a friend of Mademoiselle Pélagie Lerissel. She is acquainted with the part I played on this occasion.

“When my cousin was married, I was in a position to accomplish my design, still, it was advisable not to act with precipitation. Accordingly I waited during a few months. Then, as it was necessary so as not to provoke suspicion that her death should be, so to say, a gradual one, I determined to make her ill before killing her. This was an easy task, given the poison I intended to employ. This poison, which your experts could not discover—no astonishing circumstance, for, in the present state of science, chemistry cannot detect it (that reason leading me to make use of it)—was the only or poison of the M'Fans.

“I had heard this poison and its terrible effects spoken of by one of my husband's relatives, a naval doctor, during a visit which he paid to us at Condé. M. Gillet, who, as you may be aware, occupied himself with toxicological enquiries, had asked his relative to procure him some of this poison with the view of

making experiments. Accordingly, on his return to Africa, he procured a certain quantity of seeds of onay and sent them to my husband, who died, however, before being able to employ them. I knew that this poison formed part of M. Gillet's collection; I was acquainted with the effects it produces; I knew that it could not be isolated; I knew how to employ it; so I resolved to utilize it in the execution of my design, and I accordingly prepared an extract of it by allowing a portion of the seeds to macerate in alcohol.

"It was this extract, which I administered a first time in some jugged hare, and a second time in a cup of chocolate at Lady Sarah Barrington's, that caused the two attacks which preceded my cousin's death, and which deceived Dr. Claude and the physicians whom he consulted. The final and fatal attack was brought about in this wise: I knew that my cousin was taking pills of digitalis. I stole one of these pills from her box, and I made a similar one with dried extract of onay. For this purpose I went to purchase everything necessary at Caen—a little round box to roll the pill in, and a sheet of silver leaf so as to coat it like the pills of digitalis. I purchased the box at a wood-turner's in the Rue St. Jean, the silver leaf at a colourman's in the Rue Notre Dame. My plan was not to administer this pill myself, but to place it in the box containing the pills of digitalis, with which it would be mingled, that my cousin might take it by chance whilst I was twenty leagues from Condé. By this means I should not be suspected; indeed, all suspicions would fall to the ground, as it would be impossible to fix on any one capable of administering poison to my cousin. How could I have supposed that Dr. Claude would be seriously charged with poisoning his wife, whom he loved, and in whose life he had every interest, since he had no children by her, and she had neither made a deed of gift nor a will in his favour?

"You will remark that at this moment the will was not yet made, and that I was my cousin's heiress. I was able to act as I had planned. I placed the pill of onay in the box and started off from Condé. It was at Verneuil that I received my cousin's letter informing me that she had made a will in her husband's favour—which letter I produced during the trial. Unfortunately, I only received it after some delay. I left at once for Condé, for, the will having upset my plans, it was needless my cousin should die. I arrived, however, too late to avert her death, which I meant to have prevented by removing the pill box.

"This narrative is absolutely correct, as you will be able to

ascertain by enquiring into the truth of my statements. If I confess my offence so frankly, it is because I do not desire to see an innocent person punished in the place of one who is guilty, and also because no one will be a witness of my shame.

"In two hours I shall be dead. If I have waited till now, it is because I trusted that Dr. Claude would be either acquitted or reprieved; but as the hour appointed for his execution is nigh, I think it fit to speak. The poison with which I am about to kill myself is the same that I employed to kill my cousin. Send your experts after my death, and they will see that I have died like she died. The necropsy of my remains will, moreover, give them the same results as in her case. I venture to ask you to have this necropsy carefully performed. It will, moreover, be interesting to study the effects of onay on a human subject, and medical men will not be wanting for the purpose. I am therefore confident that the truth will be fully demonstrated, and that justice will be done to one who has been so cruelly persecuted.

"NATHALIE GILLET."

Her task was not yet ended. It remained for her to make her will and to write to M^{re} Mérault. This will of hers she wished to make in Claude's favour. For, small as were her possessions, she desired that he alone should profit by what she had. But it was necessary to find a reason for instituting Claude her legatee—a reason that would suffice for public curiosity, if the latter enquired into the matter. It was difficult to think of a good reason. Her situation, moreover, did not allow her to spend time in seeking to discover which would be the best. After a few minutes' reflection, however, she wrote as follows:—

"Having the desire to attenuate, as far as is in my power, the harm which I have done to M. Etienne Claude, I bequeath to him everything that I possess."

She signed and dated this document and then proceeded to write to M^{re} Mérault the following note.

"You will find enclosed: firstly, a letter in a sealed envelope, which I beg you to hand as soon as possible to Dr. Claude, but to him *alone*, and without its passing into any other hands than yours and his.* Secondly, a letter in an open envelope addressed to the public prosecutor, and which you will kindly read before delivering. It is necessary that you should be acquainted with its contents in order to save our friend. Thirdly, my will, the provisions of which I beg you will see executed."

That was everything. Having put the three letters and the

will fit into a large envelope, which she carefully sealed, she then proceeded to dress herself. But, before putting on her bonnet, she opened a small cupboard containing a variety of toilette articles, and took from it a little box labelled "Opiat." This label was however a false one, for the box in reality contained the remainder of the extract of onay, which she had employed to poison Veronica. She opened this box, smelt its contents, and looked at it for some time. Having laid it on the table she went round to the Mèrault's house at La Courtine.

She found Denise weeping, in the midst of her children. "My husband arrives at five o'clock," said Madame Mèrault, "and—"

"All is not yet over," interrupted Nathalie, "he may still be saved; give these letters to M. Mèrault directly he arrives, *directly*, I beg you and—then our friend will be saved."

Denise looked at Nathalie, struck by her excitement, and strove to discover the purport of these seemingly extravagant words. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"I can't explain myself," replied Nathalie, "I have only a few minutes at my disposal. I must go to work at his deliverance. These letters will explain everything to you. They are his salvation. Adieu." And before Denise, who was literally stupefied, could retain her, she had left the house. It was now three o'clock. She therefore had two hours before Mèrault arrived—not more time than was necessary for her purpose.

XXII.

At five o'clock Denise was waiting for the arrival of her husband by the diligence running in connection with the railway. Regardless of the people who stood looking at them, they threw themselves into each other's arms. By this embrace they acquainted each other with their feelings. Denise leant on Mèrault's arm and they walked towards home. "So it is all over?" she said.

"Poor Claude! I could obtain nothing, and Carbonneau failed like I did. It's horrible!" They were here interrupted by some passing acquaintances who stepped forward to shake hands with Mèrault, and to question him. He did not, however, give them any precise reply.

When they resumed their walk, Denise informed her husband of Nathalie's visit. "I am afraid she's going mad," she said, "and really it wouldn't surprise me. You may be sure she is in love with Claude."

"Poor woman ! Did she say she had received my telegram ?"
 "Yes."

"And she pretends the letters she left for me will save him ?"

"They are his salvation, she said."

"She didn't give you any explanation ?"

"She started off as if impelled by madness, saying that she only had a few minutes to work at his deliverance."

"And what did you understand by her strange words ?"

"That despair had unhinged her mind."

"Do you think so ?"

"And you—what do you think then ? you frighten me."

"Nothing, I don't want to think anything. I don't dare to suppose anything. But let us make haste and see these letters."

Without speaking they accelerated their pace, and in a few minutes had reached home. The children were in the hall waiting for their father, whom they had not seen for some time. However, he only kissed them hastily, and then followed by Denise he walked into his study. Nathalie's packet was lying on his writing table, he broke the seal, opened the outer envelope, and read the note intended for himself.

"Well ?" asked Denise.

Mérault's only answer was to hand her the note. He then took up the letter addressed to the public prosecutor. After reading the first few lines he stopped. "It was Madame Gillet who poisoned Veronica !" he exclaimed.

"Good heavens ! she's mad !"

"No, listen." He then proceeded to read the letter aloud. When he reached the passage, "In two hours I shall be dead," Denise whom emotion and anguish had hitherto left silent, exclaimed. "One must hasten to her."

But she was at once interrupted by her husband. "No," said he. "It is too late to save her, and even if there were still time it is best not to save her."

"How dreadful !"

"It is best for her to die in that manner, she punishes herself. It is of Claude that we must think."

He rapidly read the remaining lines of the confession. Then placing it in his pocket together with the letter addressed to Claude, he said. "I am going to the prosecution office. I can't tell when I shall be back."

On his way to the Palais de Justice, Mérault had to pass in front of M. Bassaget's house ; he rang the bell, but the public prosecutor had not yet come home ; he was still at his office. Here

Mérault found a servant who informed him that M. Bassaget could not receive him immediately, as he was conferring with somebody, and when he insisted on seeing the law officer at once, the servant who had formerly been in his own employ, approached him in a mysterious manner. "He's with the executioner," he said in a low tone, "the latter just arrived by the train from Paris. Ah, sir, what a misfortune!"

Mérault was about to write a pressing note, asking M. Bassaget to receive him at once, when the door opened and the executioner taking short slow steps, and without looking around him walked out of the private room. As he neared the outer door, Mérault stopped him. "Will you wait a minute," he said, "the public prosecutor will wish to speak with you again."

"But, sir—"

"Wait a few minutes I beg of you." And so saying Mérault entered M. Bassaget's private room.

Directly the public prosecutor saw him, he advanced quickly towards him. "My dear sir," said he, "believe in all my sympathy. I pity the friend with all my heart, but the advocate—I will say more, the legislator—will, I trust, understand that I was bound to oppose the reprieve asked for on behalf of this great criminal."

"Kindly read this letter," interrupted Mérault, as soon as he was able to stay M. Bassaget's volubility, "for it is most urgent. It will inform you who was the guilty person in this mysterious affair and what was the poison that killed the victim."

M. Bassaget looked at Mérault with an air of stupefaction.

"Read it," insisted Mérault.

It was necessary to comply and accordingly he took the letter from the advocate's hand, but while perusing it he did not once raise his eyes, so that Mérault could not perceive what impression these revelations produced on him. It was only on coming to the last lines that the public prosecutor paused. "This woman must be saved," he exclaimed. "She must not escape the law!"

"It is too late," replied Mérault, explaining all in a few words.

"Perhaps, though, there is still time to act," said M. Bassaget, rising from his chair. "Let us go to her apartment and on the way we will call for Dr. Evette."

"I have kept the executioner here," said Mérault. "Haven't you any orders to give him?"

"By-and-bye; before all let us try and save this woman."

On finding the executioner in the hall, M. Bassaget asked him to wait till he came back. Then, followed by Mérault, he

bounded down stairs with such speed that the door porter asked himself if the place were not on fire.

Evette was at home, just about to sit down to dinner. He at once put on his hat and accompanied M^rault and M. Bassaget, who while walking acquainted him with Nathalie's confession. However, whilst anxiety impelled the public prosecutor onwards, joy took away all Evette's breath. "So it was onay-strophantus that had killed Madame Claude!" exclaimed he. "A vegetable poison! a new one! scarcely known!" What a triumph for him! What luck if they only arrived too late to save Madame Gillet! What an interesting necropsy! He would be the only person in the world who would have had the opportunity of studying the effects of this mysterious poison in a human subject! He would be able to draw up a report for the Academy! What a pity he could not telegraph at once to Paris to have everything published about this poison sent down to him! This time he must steer clear of the Carbonneaus and the Vandams. Really providence owed him this piece of good luck!"

They found Nathalie's door locked and M. Bassaget's authoritative knocks received no answer. It was necessary to send for a locksmith in the name of the law—a proceeding which naturally created a stir in the whole neighbourhood.

"Madame Gillet!" shouted M. Bassaget. His cry received no answer. All was dark and silent.

A candle was lit in the locksmith's lantern, and M. Bassaget preceding Evette and M^rault, entered the apartment. They speedily reached the bed-room, the door of which was unlocked and in the shade, in front of a large arm-chair, they perceived a black mass lying on the floor. It was Nathalie!

Evette advanced quickly towards her. She was stretched at full length, her left cheek resting on the floor; she was quite motionless. Evette knelt down and applying his ear to her breast he listened. "She is dead," he said.

"You are sure."

"The heart does not beat, the body is scarcely warm, she must have been dead for some short time."

They then looked around them. The aspect of the room explained pretty well what had happened. In a conspicuous place on the table stood a small open box containing a yellowish substance. Near this box was a sheet of paper on which they read. "This box contains the extract of onay with which I poisoned my cousin Verouica and with which I poison myself."

A large arm-chair had been placed in the middle of the room, and it was in this that Nathalie had seated herself to die, having near at hand a stand holding a basin. In the throes of death she had evidently fallen from the arm-chair; and she still held in one of her clenched hands a towel with which she had wiped her mouth.

"It will be necessary to perform a necropsy I presume," said Evette.

"Certainly it will."

"However, there is no hurry I suppose. We can wait till after dinner."

Evette was a man of regular habits and it would have needed some grave consideration indeed for him to neglect his dinner, even when the matter in hand was such an interesting *post mortem* examination as the one he was directed to perform. Besides, he desired to go home to consult a toxicological dictionary with the view of noting, prior to the necropsy, what anatomical abrasions he might expect to find.

Meanwhile, M. Bassaget had despatched a messenger for the investigating magistrate, there was now nothing more for Mèrault to do in this apartment, besides which he had not to occupy himself with Madame Gillet but with Claude. Turning to the public prosecutor he said—"Cannot we now give our attention to him whose innocence is proved by this death?"

"Innocence, my dear sir?" This exclamation was uttered in so natural and so frank a tone, that Mèrault remained thunderstruck. "No doubt," continued M. Bassaget, "the letter you gave me is of very great importance, but it does not make Dr. Claude innocent. Who knows but he was this miserable woman's accomplice, or rather that she was his instrument?"

"But this letter is evidence that—"

"The letter is important and even equivalent to a presumption of innocence; but is no proof. The matter must be minutely investigated, and that shall be done."

"And Claude?"

"Oh, of course, we must postpone the execution."

"Postpone the execution!" cried Mèrault, with a gesture of indignation and disgust. "And set him at liberty?" he asked.

"You mean, place him in solitary confinement, dear sir. This is what the investigating magistrate will have done."

"You are going to leave him under the threat of execution when his innocence is proclaimed?"

"Pleaded, not proclaimed. Besides, I shall take no decision

without consulting the procureur-general, and that I will do the first thing to-morrow."

Mérault found himself utterly unable to obtain anything more than this.

XXIII.

FIVE-AND-TWENTY days after Nathalie's death Claude was still in solitary confinement. After attempting all he could at Condé to obtain an interview with the prisoner, Mérault left again for Paris, and there resumed his endeavours. But he encountered the same difficulties in the capital as at Condé. "The matter was a grave one," he was told, "complicity was possible. It was necessary to see. If an error had been committed in the first instance, it was necessary that none should be made now. A decision of the law was in question. What were the sufferings of an individual in comparison with such an important point?" Everywhere, and always, the same answers:—"The execution had been postponed. There was no hurry. It was necessary to proceed with great care and precaution."

At the same time he learnt that the obstinate resistance which he had encountered at Condé showed no signs of abatement.

"Madame Gillet's guilt is readily admitted," wrote old Caradon, "for guilt is always admitted, the legal authorities preferring to discover ten criminals instead of not finding one at all. But, on the other hand, they won't frankly recognise poor Claude's innocence. Just fancy what a humiliation for the public prosecutor and for the presiding judge, who displayed such ardour in their endeavours to obtain an affirmative verdict! M. Bassaget is in such a violent state of exasperation that his health is in danger—but on this latter point I don't care a fig, as you may well imagine. He can't control himself, and the spectacle of his struggle against evidence would be comic if it were not lamentable. President Hairies de la Freslonière is too cunning to put himself forward in an ostensible manner, but his underhand intriguing may be all the more dangerous. I don't know what he is doing in reference to the authorities in Paris, but here he resorts to epigrams calculated to make you and Claude ridiculous. He calls the latter 'the honest criminal,' or else 'the interesting victim of a judicial error;' while you are 'a new Voltaire, the advocate of a new Calas.' It

harsh, grew soft and affectionate. But Denise soon took the children away. "Our friend Claude," she said, "wants to be alone with your father; you will meet him by-and-bye at dinner."

"I want to be next to him," said Jeanne.

"And I too," said Emma.

"That's understood, you shall be on either side of him."

"Now," said Claude, when Denise had left the room with the children, "what I want you to explain to me first of all—for it is the point I have most at heart—is what we have to do to have my trial revised and set aside."

"We have nothing to do."

"Why nothing? Who takes the initiative then?"

"No one my poor friend," said Mérault sadly.

"How no one? You say we have nothing to do. Why not?"

"Because there is nothing to do."

"But I *must* have my trial revised. You will understand I can't remain under that sentence."

"I also should like to have it revised, but the law is against us."

"That's impossible!"

"I would not speak lightly, my friend, on such a subject. The law only allows a trial to be revised in certain cases. In your case this could only have been done if the guilty person had been tried and condemned for the same crime as yourself. Then, as the two condemnations would be opposed to each other, their contradiction would have shown that one of the two persons condemned was innocent—but Madame Gillet's suicide made it impossible to try her, and so your trial cannot be revised."

"But this is monstrous."

"Such is the law, however."

"So some one has to be condemned, whether he be innocent or not! There is a crime and some one must pay for it, whether he be guilty or not guilty! But ~~am~~ I innocent, yes or no?"

"You were condemned as an innocent man; therefore, you will remain condemned; if you had been guilty and been acquitted, you would always have remained acquitted."

Claude took his head in both hands. "Imprisonment must have troubled my brain," he exclaimed, "for I can scarcely understand you. Are there not condemned men who are rehabilitated?"

"Rehabilitation is not revision. We will ask for your rehabilitation, only we cannot do so at once; it is necessary to wait—" he here hesitated—"it is necessary to wait five years."

"But, then, how am I free?"

"Letters of pardon are granted you."

"An innocent man *pardoned*! They have *only* pardon to give to one who has been unjustly condemned! So that is the reparation they offer me after making me suffer as they have done. To-day, pardon—and in five years rehabilitation. They admit that I am innocent and yet during five years I must remain a dishonoured, a condemned felon. Is it possible?"

Claude was in a state of such feverish agitation that this was a difficult and dangerous subject to discuss. M^{er}aault accordingly determined to turn their conversation in another direction, even at the risk of grieving his friend. Opening a drawer of his writing-table he took from it Nathalie's two letters—the one addressed to himself and the one intended for Claude. "Here," said he, "is a letter which was confided to me, and—he here read a passage of Nathalie's note—which I was to deliver to you as soon as possible without it passing through any other hands than mine. This will explain to you why I only accomplish this duty now."

Claude took the letter with a trembling hand, but after looking at the superscription and recognising the handwriting, he refrained from opening the envelope. Indeed, he tore the letter into four pieces, and threw them into the fire.

When the fragments of paper were entirely burnt he turned towards M^{er}aault. "With your permission," said he, "we will never talk of her who wrote that letter, and now, once for all, we will decide what concerns her. I have no wish to accept her legacy, still her property might be turned to beneficial account. Will you, therefore, found as many beds at the Condé hospital as the income is sufficient to provide for. I ask you to do this so that I may not have to occupy myself with the affair, which would evoke a horrible recollection I should so like to banish. Besides, does the law allow me to do anything whatsoever myself?"

"You will have a guardian."

"Well, if *you* are my guardian, so much the better."

At this moment the door opened, and little Jeanne, with an air of mingled boldness and timidity, entered the room. "It's me," she said, "because I'm hungry."

Denise hastened in, to scold her for having disturbed her father, but the intervention had produced its effect. They all went into the dining-room where the children's prattle soon turned Claude's head—accustomed as he had been during so many months to the silence of solitude. While they were at

dessert, a servant entered with a card which she gave to Claude. "Niobey!" he exclaimed.

"Ask him to come in," said Denise, swiftly rising from her seat to go and meet the visitor. The latter was Claude's old comrade, who having by chance learnt what was going on at Condé, from a French newspaper which had reached him, had hastened home so as to participate in Claude's defence, if there was still time. This arrival caused a fresh diversion.

On the morrow Claude informed Mèrault and Denise that he was going to start with Niobey on a long journey round the world. They did not try to retain him. What would he have done at Condé? What could he do in France? Change of scene and travel might palliate if not obliterate his grief. A couple of days later the two friends started for Le Havre, and then embarked for New York.

A month ago Denise received a colossal case, covered with many-coloured labels. On being opened it was found to contain several smaller cases, ticketed with one of the following names—"Denise," "Louis Mèrault," "Emma," "Arthur," and "Jeanne." Inside the one addressed to Denise a quantity of Japanese porcelain was found; Mèrault's contained some bronzes, whilst the children's were replete with Chinese toys.

One alone—larger than the others—bore no label. It contained a magnificent bronze vaso, inside which the following note was found:—

"Dear Denise,—Have this vase placed on my dear wife's tomb, and kindly keep it decked with flowers until your friend comes back.

"CLAUDE."

THE END.

